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End Khalistani terror: India tells US Spy Chief

Rajnath urged US Intelligence Chief to declare Pannun's SKF as designated terrorist entity

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday conveyed to US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard India's concerns over activities of Khalistani separatist group Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) on American soil. He urged her to declare it as a designated terrorist entity, sources said.

In an over 30-minute meeting at his office in the Raisina Hills, Singh also apprised Gabbard about SFJ's alleged links with Pakistani spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) as well as its "collaboration" with Babbar Khalsa militant group.

Singh flagged concerns over the SFJ, headed by Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, targeting various Hindu religious structures in the US and said such activities must be stopped.

Separately, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar also met Gabbard.

Singh and Gabbard explored ways to boost India-US collaboration in niche defence technologies, information sharing and integration of defence industrial supply chains.

Gabbard arrived in the national capital early Sunday on a two-and-a-half-day trip in the first high-level visit to India by a top official of the Donald Trump administration.

It is understood that the two sides also deliberated on the evolving security situation in the Indo-Pacific against the backdrop of China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the region.

> **President Trump has been very clear about his commitment to defeating this threat of Islamist terrorism that has unfortunately plagued us**
>
> -Tulsi Gabbard, US Intelligence Chief

Singh said Gabbard and Singh emphasised that "strategic security" remains a vital pillar of the India-US comprehensive global strategic cooperation.

Gabbard's talks with Singh came a day after she met National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and attended a conclave of global intelligence czars in the national capital hosted by India.

Doval and Gabbard mainly discussed ways to strengthen intelligence sharing and working closely in the security domain in sync with the India-US global strategic partnership, it is learnt. The US Director of National Intelligence, Canadian Spy Chief Daniel Rogers and UK National Security Adviser Jonathan Powell were among the top global intelligence czars who attended the India-hosted security conclave chaired by Doval. It is learnt that the top intelligence and security officials focused on sharing of intelligence and cooperation to tackle terrorism. *—PTI*

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MODI GIFTS GABBARD WATER FROM KUMBH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard in New Delhi and presented her with water from the Ganga, collected during the Maha Kumbh. In return, Gabbard gifted Tulsi Mala to Modi. Gabbard, a staunch follower of Lord Krishna, said she turned to his teachings in the best and worst of times to learn critical lessons.

PM JOINS TRUMP-OWNED TRUTH SOCIAL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday joined Truth Social, a social media platform owned by Trump Media and Technology Group. Modi's debut on Truth Social came on a day when US President Donald Trump shared his podcast with Lex Fridman on his social media handle. In a post in response to Trump, Modi thanked the US President for sharing his podcast.

PM raises Khalistan concerns with NZ PM Luxon

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

India and New Zealand on Monday inked an ambitious pact to institutionalise defence ties and vowed to boost cooperation in the Indo-Pacific even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged concerns to his Kiwi counterpart Christopher Luxon over certain pro-Khalistani elements indulging in anti-India activities in the island nation.

In his media statement, Modi said India and New Zealand support a free, open, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific, adding "We believe in the policy of development, not expansionism", remarks that came amid growing global concerns over China's expansionist behaviour in the region.

Modi, referring to the 2019 Christchurch terror attack and the 26/11 Mumbai strike, said that terrorism in any form is "unacceptable" expressing concerns over pro-khalistani elements in New Zealand.

Following talks between Modi and Luxon, the two sides signed six agreements to ramp up cooperation in several areas including education, sports, agriculture and climate change, immigration and decided to prepare a roadmap for cooperation in the defence industry sector and welcomed the launch of free trade negotiations. *—PTI*

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Dragon, elephant must work together: China lauds Modi

BEIJING, 17 MARCH

China on Monday appreciated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "positive" remarks on the Sino-Indian ties favouring dialogue over discord.

"A cooperative dance between the elephant and dragon contributing to mutual success is the only choice for both sides," said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here while responding to a question on Modi's remarks in conversation with American podcaster Lex Fridman.

The successful meeting between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi in Kazan, Russia, last October provided strategic guidance for the improvement and development of the bilateral ties, she said.

China stands ready to work with India to implement the important common understandings between the two leaders, take the 75th anniversary of the diplomatic relations as an opportunity, promote exchange and cooperation in various fields and at all levels, and advance bilateral ties on the track of sound and stable development, Mao said.

In his podcast, Modi said normalcy has returned to the India-China border after his recent talks with President Xi to defuse tensions ignited by the 2020 clashes between the two armies in eastern Ladakh. *—PTI*

Pakistan fumes on Modi's 'one-sided' remarks on J&K

ISLAMABAD, 17 MARCH

Pakistan on Monday rejected as "misleading and one-sided" the remarks made on Jammu and Kashmir by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a podcast and claimed the dispute remained unsolved for seven decades.

In a statement released by Pakistan Foreign office, the neighbouring country alleged that India was involved in fomenting trouble on Pakistani soil and carrying out "state-sanctioned oppression" in Jammu and Kashmir. Modi had said that New Delhi's attempts to foster peace were met with hostility. *—PTI*

Ahead of TASMAC protest, Annamalai detained & released

CHENNAI, 17 MARCH

Several Tamil Nadu BJP leaders, including the party's state president K Annamalai were detained and released on Monday ahead of their ahead of their protest against the alleged irregularities in state-run liquor retailer TASMAC. Annamali claimed he had been put "under house arrest" in a social media post. Annamalai was detained near his house along with his supporters by the police. Lashing out at CM Stalin, Annamalai said it was his 'guess' that the DMK leader was 'afraid' of something and was 'strangulating' BJP's voice. Annamalai had lashed out at the ruling DMK alleging the "rupee symbol and budget drama" were an attempt to divert attention from the recent ED raids at the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation. *—PTI*

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1 terrorist killed in Kupwara

SRINAGAR, 17 MARCH

An unidentified terrorist was killed in an encounter with security forces in the Zachaldara area of Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district on Monday, officials here said. The security forces launched a cordon and search operation in Krumhoora village in Zachaldara following information about the presence of terrorists in the area, the officials said. The search operation turned into an encounter after the terrorists opened fire towards the security forces' positions. One terrorist was killed in retaliatory firing and some arms and ammunition were recovered from the spot, they said. The identity and group affiliation of the slain terrorist were yet to be ascertained. *—PTI*

Manipur dist tense after tribal leader attacked

IMPHAL, 17 MARCH

A day after a leader of the Hmar tribe was assaulted by unknown miscreants in Manipur's Churachandpur district headquarters town, tensions escalated on Monday as locals demanded the identification of the perpetrators, police said. As a precautionary measure, the additional district magistrate imposed curbs across the district under Section 163 of the BNSS 2023. "Whereas reports have been received from the Churachandpur superintendent of police, indicating a serious apprehension of a breach of law and order in the district, which is likely to disturb peace and tranquillity among different communities and may lead to damage to life and public property," the order said. *—PTI*

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Violence in Nagpur as groups clash over Aurangzeb

NAGPUR, 17 MARCH

Tension gripped central Nagpur on Monday when stones were hurled at police amid rumours that the holy book of the Muslims was burnt during an agitation by a Right-wing body for the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb, leaving four people injured, officials said.

Amid violence in Nagpur, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday night called for peace and asked people not to believe rumours.

Police fired tear gas shells and resorted to cane-charge to disperse the mob in Chitnis Park and Mahal areas. Violence also reportedly spread to Kotwali and Ganeshpeth in the late afternoon, officials said.

Officials said the Chitnish Park to Shukrawari Talao road belt was most affected by violence as per the preliminary information, where some four-wheelers were set afire by rioters. Stones were also thrown at the homes of residents. Police are trying to disperse mobs believed to be in thousands. The trouble began after Bajrang Dal demonstrated near the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj statue. According to police, rumours spread that the Quran was burnt. Videos of the Bajrang Dal demonstration quickly went viral on social media, leading to outrage among Muslims. *—PTI*

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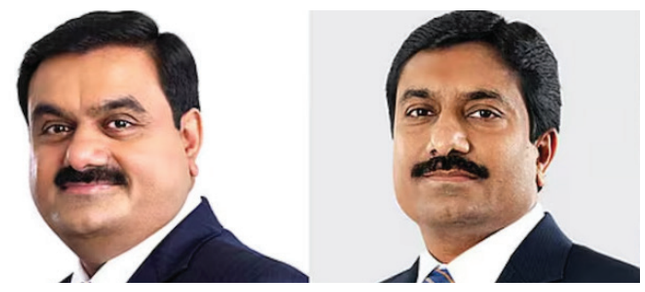
Bombay HC acquits Adanis in ₹388cr scam



Gautam Adani and his brother Rajesh Adani PHOTO:ADANI.COM

MUMBAI, 17 MARCH

The Bombay High Court on Monday discharged Adani Enterprises Ltd, group Chairman Gautam Adani and MD Rajesh Adani from a case of alleged violations of market regulations involving Rs 388 crore, saying no case of cheating or criminal conspiracy was made out.

The Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) in 2012 initiated the case against the Adani Enterprises Limited (AEL) and its promoters Gautam Adani and Rajesh Adani, and filed a chargesheet, accusing them of criminal conspiracy and cheating.

In 2019, the company and the two industrialists filed a petition in the HC, seeking to quash a sessions court order of the same year refusing to discharge them from the case.

The HC's single bench of Justice R N Laddha on Monday quashed the sessions court order and discharged the duo and the company from the case.

- When the offence of cheating itself is not made out, then even the charge of criminal conspiracy becomes unsustainable, it added.

The court in its order said a careful evaluation of the submissions and records makes it "evident that the complaint fails to satisfy the essential ingredients of the offence of cheating". When the offence of cheating itself is not made out, then even the charge of criminal conspiracy becomes unsustainable, it added.

"A fundamental requirement for an offence under section 420 of the IPC (cheating) is the presence of an element of deception, which leads to the victim suffering from loss while the accused gains wrongfully," the HC said.

However, in the present case, there is a conspicuous absence of any such allegations from an affected party, it said. *—PTI*

50 TRAIN OPERATORS

Namma Metro under fire for hiring 'non-locals'

HAMEED ASHRAF
BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Even as pro-Kannada activists and political leaders accused the Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) of sidelining local candidates in its latest recruitment drive for train operators, Namma Metro officials on Monday played down the charge as misrepresentation of facts.

The recruitment notification, issued on 12 March, calls for 50 train operators on a contract basis and accords priority to candidates with prior experience in metro systems such as those in Hyderabad and Chennai. Activists argue that this criterion unfairly excludes local aspirants who lack such experience, fuelling the language debate in Karnataka.

Speaking to Salar News, AAP State President Mukhyamantri Chandru said it was an attempt to deliberately exclude Kannadigas. "Most senior positions in BMRCL are occupied by non-Kannadigas. Now, even qualifications for operator-level jobs are being manipulated to deny locals their rightful opportunities. This injustice must stop," he said.

The Karnataka Rakshana Vedike and Metro Employees' Union also raised concerns, stating that the BMRCL should train local candidates instead of bringing in experienced workers from outside the state. Various pro-Kannada groups have warned of protests, including disruptions of metro services, if their demands are not responded to within 15 days.

Dismissing the allegations, the BMRCL said the notification was being misinterpreted. Chief Public Relation Officer BL Yeshwanth Chavan said the recruitment was a temporary measure to address an immediate shortage. "Permanent hiring takes time. The knowledge of Kannada is preferred, and even experienced Kannadigas working outside Karnataka can apply," he said. Speaking to Salar News, BMRCL Managing Director Maheshwar Rao said the notification will be reviewed to check for errors. "We will go through the notification once again. If there are any issues, we will rectify them," he said.

"We are bound by government policies. Metro operations in Bengaluru have been running for over a decade, and if there are eligible Kannadigas with the required skills, we will certainly hire them.

These are contract-based positions, and we will revisit the notification if needed," he said. *— Salar News*

WHAT BMRCL NOTIFICATION SAID

"BMRCL invites applications for the post in the Operation & Maintenance Wing of BMRCL on 'Contract Basis' for a period of 5 years which may be extended based on the performance of the employee. The applicant must have post qualification experience of minimum 3 years as Train Operator (TO) in any Metro Rail Operations..."

PHOTO: FREEPIK

FIR against 3 for playing M'rashtra anthem in Belagavi

BELAGAVI, 17 MARCH

In a contentious incident, the Belagavi police have filed a suo motu FIR against three individuals for playing the Maharashtra state anthem during a Holi festival celebration. Hundreds participated in the celebration at Chavat Galli, where attendees danced to the song "Jai Jai Maharashtra Maza" on Friday. The FIR targets organiser Sunil Jadav, Dolby instrument supplier Vaibhav Gavade from Gojaga village, and the Dolby operator. Belagavi is a sensitive area concerning language and border issues, prompting swift police action in response to the matter. *—Salar News*

3 from M'rashtra family killed in Belagavi accident

BELAGAVI, 17 MARCH

Three members of a family from Sangli, south Maharashtra, were killed instantly, and two others were injured in a tragic accident involving their car and a lorry in Chikkodi taluk, Belagavi district, on Monday morning. The victims have been identified as Tumaram Koli, 72, his wife Rukhmini Koli, 62, and their daughter Kalpana Ajitkumar Koli, 32. The injured are Aadhitya Koli, 11, and Anuj Koli, 13, along with the car's driver. All injured parties were admitted to a private hospital in Chikkodi. The family was en route to visit Yallamma Temple in Savadatti taluk when the accident occurred near Siddapurwadi cross. The Ankali police have registered a case. *—Salar News*

3 women drown washing clothes in Davangere

DAVANGERE, 17 MARCH

Three women who had been to wash clothes near a lake in Davangere drowned on Monday afternoon. The victims: Deeparani, 30, her sister Divya, 26, and their neighbour Chandana, 19, were washing their clothes in a lake between Lakshmisagar and Diggenahalli in Channageri. According to police, the incident occurred when Chandana ventured into the water for a swim but got trapped in the muddy water. In an attempt to save her, both Deeparani and Divya jumped into the lake. Unfortunately, they too drowned. Deeparani leaves behind three children, while Divya has one daughter, and Chandana was recently married. *—Salar News*

Quarry worker dies after boulders fall on him in Kolar

KOLAR, 17 MARCH

Venkatesh, a 60-year-old native of Andhra Pradesh, succumbed to injuries sustained when several large boulders fell on him while he was working at a quarry near Makarahalli, Kolar district. According to Om Prakash, Inspector of the Masthi police station, the incident occurred around 7.30am when three workers were drilling holes in the boulders with a compressor to prepare for blasting. During this operation, loose boulders unexpectedly collapsed onto the labourers. While two other workers, Harish and Eshwar, managed to escape, Venkatesh was unable to flee due to his age and was struck by the falling debris, suffering serious injuries, including a head injury. He was promptly transported to Jalappa Hospital in Kolar but was unfortunately declared dead upon arrival. Purushotham, under who the quarry was licensed was expected to be present to ensure safety protocols were followed. However, he did not arrive on-site, prompting the workers, to begin work before his arrival, leading to this tragic accident. *—Salar News*

CM's remarks on RSS stall Assembly

BJP says CM overstepped his limits

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Karnataka Assembly on Monday witnessed uproarious scenes, leading to adjournment twice over Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's remarks on RSS and Bajrang Dal and debate over who defeated Ambedkar in general elections in 1952.

BJP MLAs raised objections saying that the CM was crossing the limits on his remarks over the two outfits and should not say that. They accused Congress of withdrawing cases against the banned outfit Popular Front of India (PFI). Siddaramaiah rejected their allegation, saying that the government has not withdrawn cases against the PFI and Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI). "We have not done anything like that. You only stand in support of those who give provocative statements," the Chief Minister said.

The house was adjourned after the Leader of Opposition, R Ashoka, cautioned that the BJP will not let the House function until the CM withdraws his statement.

The commotion continued when the proceedings started.

CM Siddaramaiah said it was Congress government that enacted a legislation regarding Scheduled Castes Sub Plan and Tribal Sub Plan in 2013 ***PHOTO: PTI***

Ashoka demanded that the CM's statement should be removed from the records and he should withdraw his statement. The CM said he did not use any unparliamentary words. Ruckus in Karnataka Legislative Assembly also continued over who defeated BR Ambedkar who contested from Bombay North constituency in general elections in 1952, Speaker UT Khader has allocated time on Friday afternoon for discussion on the subject.

The BJP alleged that the Congress was responsible for B R Ambedkar's defeat in the 1952 Lok Sabha polls, and countering it by claiming that it was Hindutva idealogue VD Savarkar, who was responsible for it. Siddaramaiah, while replying to the debate on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address, pointed out that it was the Congress government in Karnataka that enacted a legislation regarding Scheduled Castes Sub Plan and Tribal Sub Plan in 2013, after neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, which was first state to do so, and said, "it was not BJP ruled states which did it... not central government."

After heated arguments and counters, the Speaker fixed Friday afternoon time for discussion on the subject. *—PTI*

Youth Congress defies DKS' ban on banners

SARAH FAZAL
BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Karnataka Pradesh Youth Congress Committee (KPYCC) appears to disregard the directive of their own Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) President and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who on 16 March ordered a ban on unauthorised banners.

The surroundings of the KPCC office on Queens Road were awash with Congress banners on 17 March. Shivakumar had instructed officials to inspect their respective zones and remove illegal banners. When **Salar News** spoke to him ahead of his swearing-in ceremony at Palace Grounds on 17 March, KPYCC President HS Manjunath said, "The banners will stay until the event ends. We are aware of the order and will take it down three to four hours after the oath-taking ceremony. We have been charged a penalty for the same, which we will pay." When **Salar News** contacted BBMP Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath to find out if any special permission was granted to the Youth Congress, he did not respond.

However, just a few hours after the swearing-in ceremony, the BBMP Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath held a meeting where he said that illegal flex-boards and banners in Bengaluru have increased and that they must be removed. He directed civic officials to double fines for the illegal displays and register FIRs against violators.

BBMP Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath said that illegal banners in City have increased and that they must be removed ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Shivajinagar MLA Rizwan Arshad told **Salar News**, "The Youth Congress was not given any permission to keep flexes and banners intact. Hence, a case has been registered against them, and a certain penalty has also been levied, but I am unsure about the amount." After the event, BBMP filed FIRs against three Congress leaders and four state revenue officials and imposed a Rs 1 lakh fine on each of them. The BBMP mistakenly listed BJP leader KS Manjunath Gowda instead of HS Manjunath in the Kannada FIR copy. *—Salar News*

BBMP budget to focus on infra development

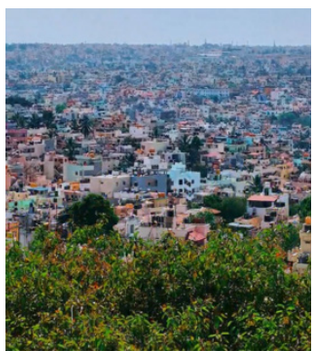
BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

For the fifth consecutive year, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) budget will be presented without elected representatives. The budget, scheduled for 27 March, will be tabled by the Special Commissioner for Finance.

BBMP Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath confirmed that Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar will be present at the unveiling. The Karnataka state budget has allocated Rs 7,000 crore to the BBMP, and the municipal budget is expected to exceed Rs 15,000 crore.

This year's budget will prioritise improving Bengaluru's infrastructure, focusing on stormwater drains and the healthcare sector. Officials have indicated that initiatives will be introduced to mitigate urban flooding during the monsoon season.

Significant allocations are anticipated for road repairs, pothole filling, electricity provision, drinking water supply, and white-topping of roads to enhance urban development. However, concerns have emerged regarding lower funding for education, attributed to the state government's decision to take over BBMP-run schools and PU colleges.



Aerial video of Bengaluru's Nandini Layout ***PHOTO: X***

₹15,000cr
is expected to be the municipal budget, with the Karnataka State budget allocating ₹7,000 crore to the BBMP

BBMP has reported a property tax collection of Rs 4,604 crore for the fiscal year 2024-25, achieving 88.36% of its target of Rs 5,210 crore. The e-Khata initiative, implemented in October 2024, has facilitated the issuance of 2.25 lakh electronic property documents, streamlining ownership records. *—Salar News*

Priyank Kharge flays BJP over minority bias claims

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Minister for Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Priyank Kharge, has vehemently rejected allegations from BJP that the Congress government is favouring minorities, particularly Muslims, in the State budget. He challenged the opposition to address genuine issues rather than attempting to sow discord along religious lines.

Priyank highlighted comments made by Jamal Siddiqui, the national president of the BJP Minority Morcha, who urged BJP leaders to distribute 'Saughat-e-Modi' kits to Muslims during Ramadan. "Siddiqui stated that 32 lakh Ramadan kits are being distributed to Muslims. Is this not favouritism?" he questioned, mocking BJP leaders for their criticism of the government's welfare initiatives for minorities.

Kharge drew attention to the BJP dubbing the recent Karnataka State Budget 2025 a 'Halal Budget', accusing Congress of appeasing minority communities. "When the BJP acts for minorities for political gain, it's called 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas.' But when we do something, they claim we are building Pakistan here," he stated. Taking a jab at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Priyank recalled Modi's gesture of sending a chadar to Ajmer Sharif and noted that during visits from Muslim leaders, Modi often posed for selfies. He sarcastically referred to Modi's 2015 visit to Pakistan, which cost Rs 2.86 lakh. Kharge asserting that government exemplifies 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', in contrast to BJP's selective approach. *—Salar News*

KALABURAGI TRANS WOMAN STRIPPED & ASSAULTED

KALABURAGI, 17 MARCH

A shocking incident has unfolded in Kalaburagi, leaving the local community in disbelief where a transgender woman, Ankita Chavhan, was stripped, assaulted, and humiliated by her fellow companions in a daylight attack. The assailants, named Shivani, Bhavani, Mala, and Sheela, targeted Ankita after she requested the return of money she had earned through begging.

Ankita, who had been living with Mala, disclosed that she had been handing over her earnings of approximately Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000 daily. Following her demand for her money back, she was brutally beaten by six other transgender women. Ankita called for strict punishment for her attackers, noting that this was not an isolated incident; she had faced multiple assaults for refusing to share her earnings.

In a related incident, tensions erupted at the Ganagapur Dattatreya Temple, where one group of transgender individuals reportedly assaulted others over territorial disputes regarding begging rights.

The Ashok Nagar Police have visited GIMS Hospital to gather details on the assault, with an ongoing investigation seeking to uncover any further motives behind this brutal attack. *—Salar News*

APPU'S BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Late actor Puneeth Rajkumar's family members distribute food near his samadhi at Kanteerava Studio, Bengaluru, on his 50th birth anniversary on Monday. Puneeth, fondly known as Appu and Power Star, was celebrated by his fans across the State ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

OATH-TAKING EVENT

Congress leader Rajeev Gowda with AICC Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan during Youth Congress President Manjunath Gowda's oath-taking event at Palace Grounds in Bengaluru on Monday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

BJP to challenge 4% Muslim quota in court

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

The opposition BJP renewed its attack on the ruling Congress over the 4 percent reservation for minorities in government contracts calling it an "unconstitutional misadventure". BJP MP Tejasvi Surya said the party will fight against the move across all levels and even challenge it in the court until it is rolled back.

Congress rejected BJP's allegation that religion-based reservation was "against constitutional provisions."

The Leader of the Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly, R Ashoka said, "Yet, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah wore a 'topi' (skull cap), organised Tipu Jayanti, and introduced Shaadi Bhagya . Now, by offering four per cent reservation in contracts to Muslims, the Congress government has made an assault on Hindus," he alleged.

Defending the reservation, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said that Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists are citizens of this country. *—PTI*

FRUIT VENDOR HELD FOR RAPING MINOR GIRL

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

A 30-year-old fruit vendor was arrested for allegedly raping a minor girl.

A Rajajinagar police officer said that Sunil, the accused and a native of Bangarpet, befriended the girl while she was waiting for a bus at the Majestic Bus Stand on 14 March. He took the girl to various places, including Tirupati where he allegedly raped her at a private hotel, the officer said. *—Salar news*

RS 12.56 CRORE HAUL

DGP Ramchandra summoned over gold smuggling case

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Karnataka DGP K Ramchandra Rao, stepfather of actress Ranya Rao, has been summoned for questioning in the ongoing gold smuggling case involving his stepdaughter. She was arrested on 3 March at Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru after authorities seized 14.2 kg of foreign-origin gold bars worth Rs 12.56 crore from her possession.

Meanwhile, the bail petition of Ranya Rao, has been adjourned until 19 March.

The case was heard on Monday in the CCH 64th Court, which has directed the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) to file its objections before the next hearing. Further proceedings will continue after the submission of objections.

PHOTO: X

This follows the Special Court for Economic Offences rejecting Rao's previous bail plea last week, citing the seriousness of the charges against her. In a related development, the Karnataka High Court has extended its interim order preventing the DRI from arresting Rao's husband, Jatin Vijayakumar Hukkeri, in connection with the ongoing probe. Meanwhile, the second accused in the case, hotelier Tarun Raju, has been remanded to judicial custody for 15 days as investigations continue.

—Salar News with Agencies

FIR FILED IN MALAVALLI FOOD POISONING CASE

MYSURU, 17 MARCH

The Malavalli Police filed a FIR against six individuals linked to a suspected food poisoning incident that resulted in the death of a 13-year-old Meghalaya student from a private school. The incident also left 28 other students ill after consuming leftover pulao rice.

The FIR, initiated by Malavalli Block Education Officer Uma, targets event organiser Pushpendrakumar, hotel owner Siddaraju, Kalyana Mantap staff member Krishna, Gokul Vidya Samsthe school chief Lankesh, Secretary Jagadeesh, and school helper Abhishek. Seven students remain in critical condition. *—Salar News*

Bird flu fears rise as crows mysteriously die in Bidar

BIDAR, 17 MARCH

Concerns over a potential outbreak of bird flu are escalating in Karnataka following a series of suspicious crow deaths in Bidar. Recently, two dead crows were discovered on the premises of the government hospital in Bhalki town. Last month, hundreds of crows perished in Udgir, Maharashtra—an area adjacent to Bhalki taluk—following the detection of initial bird flu cases. With crows dying daily in Bidar, people are worried that the avian virus may have spread to their region.

Adding to the concern, it has been reported that poultry is being trafficked illegally from Maharashtra to bordering areas in Karnataka. Villagers are urging veterinary officials to probe the dead crows. Narasappa, Deputy Director of the Animal Husbandry Department, told **Salar News** that his team collected samples from the deceased crows found at the hospital and dispatched them to the state laboratory in Bengaluru for analysis. He assured that further actions will be dictated by the lab results, which are expected within three days. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Ch'garh govt to enact law against illegal conversion

RAIPUR, 17 MARCH

Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma on Monday said the state government will soon enact a stringent law to prevent illegal religious conversion. "Though the Chhattisgarh Freedom of Religion Act is in force, the government is thinking that new legal provisions should come into force. New provisions will be introduced at an appropriate time," Sharma said. Sharma, who also holds the Home portfolio, said this after ruling BJP raised the issue of alleged through a call attention notice in the assembly. BJP MLA Ajay Chandrashekar had claimed there were several NGOs in the state who were involved in the forced conversions. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Naidu bats for native language education

AMARAVATI, 17 MARCH

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday asserted that individuals studying in their mother tongue excel globally, challenging the prevailing misconception that mastery of the English language is the sole pathway to knowledge. Speaking in the Assembly, Naidu emphasised, "Language is only for communication. Knowledge will not come with language. Only people who study in their mother tongue are excelling across the world. It is easy to learn through the mother tongue." His comments follow recent debates initiated by his Deputy Chief Minister and Janasena chief, Pawan Kalyan, regarding the contentious language issues between Tamil Nadu and the Union Government. Naidu urged against "unnecessary politics over languages" and promoting linguistic diversity. *—PTI*

AIMPLB stages protest against Waqf Bill

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board on Monday led a protest at Jantar Manta against the Waqf (Amendment) Bill and was joined by several MPs from various parties including TMC and SP. AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi told NDA members TDP, JD(U) and LJP (Ramvilas) that Muslims will never forgive them if they support the legislation. Owaisi claimed the Narendra Modi government's intention to bring the Waqf Bill is to disturb peace in the country. "The prime minister's intention is that people keep fighting over Mandir-Masjid. Safeguarding Waqf properties is not the bill's objective," the AIMIM chief said claiming the bill attempts to take away Waqf board properties. *—PTI*

Ex-Union minister Debendra Pradhan dies at 84

BHUBANESWAR, 17 MARCH

Veteran BJP leader Debendra Pradhan, who was a minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, died on Monday. He was 84 and survived by two sons, including Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. A veteran in Odisha politics and a three-time BJP state unit president Pradhan was instrumental in stablishing the party in the state during its formative years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP president JP Nadda and President Draupadi Murmu were among those who paid their last respects to Debendra. "Debendra Pradhan made a mark as a hardworking and humble leader. He made numerous efforts to strengthen the BJP in Odisha. Pained by his passing away. Went to pay my last respects and expressed condolences to his family," Modi posted on X. *—PTI*

Amid wars, Doval meets spy chiefs of Five Eyes

The meet was also attended by US' Gabbard, NZ spy head

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The meeting between key players from at least three of the Five Eyes partners in New Delhi on Sunday signals a close tie between New Delhi and the alliance.

At least three of the Five Eyes partners —an intelligence-sharing alliance between US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand — were present at the meet. US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, UK's National Security Advisor Jonathan Powell and New Zealand's intelligence head Andrew Hampton joined intelligence chiefs of different countries at the gathering.

The intelligence tsars, attending a conference organised by the National Security Council Secretariat, were being hosted by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, R&AW chief Ravi Sinha and Intelligence Bureau director Tapan Deka.

Both Gabbard and Powell will also attend the Raisina Dialogue, starting Monday. Organised by the Observer Research Foundation and the Ministry of External Affairs, the three-day conference will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, who reached New Delhi Sunday, will join the inaugural session as the Chief Guest and deliver the keynote address.

Representatives from nearly 125 countries including Ministers, former Heads of State and Heads of Government, military commanders, industry captains, technology leaders, academics, journalists, scholars on strategic affairs, experts from leading think tanks will participate in the Dialogue.

The meet is crucial because India has hosted this conference since 2022 when the intelligence chiefs started meeting quietly on the sidelines of the Raisina Dialogue. *—PTI*

Tulsi Gabbard with NSA Ajit Doval in Delhi on Monday PHOTO: PTI

ALL ABOUT FIVE EYES

Started by US & UK, it is controversial for controlling intel

Who are the key members?

- Australia
- Canada
- New Zealand
- United Kingdom
- United States

Why do they exist?

Origins traced to World War 2.

Monitored Soviet communication during Cold War.

Currently monitors communication internationally.

What do they do now?

Each of the Five Eyes states conducts interception, collection, acquisition, analysis and decryption activities, sharing all intelligence information with the others by default

OPP WALKS OUT OF ASSEMBLY

TASMAC stir: Annamalai held, then released

CHENNAI, 17 MARCH

BJP Tamil Nadu president K Annamalai, the party's women's wing national chief Vanathi Srinivasan and senior state leader H Raja were among the party leaders detained on Monday by the police ahead of their protest against the alleged irregularities in state-run liquor retailer TASMAC. They was later released

The saffron party had announced a protest of the TASMAC headquarters over the alleged Rs 1,000 crore irregularities.

In a social media post, Annamalai, the BJP state chief alleged senior party leaders including former state president and ex-Governor of Telangana, Tamilisai Soundararajan have been placed "under house arrest" by the police.

They were later let off around 7pm. The party would intensify protests on the matter, including putting up "framed pictures" of Chief Minister MK Stalin in TASMAC shops, he said.

"I charge that their symbol drama, budget drama was all aimed at diverting attention from ED raids," he said about the DMK government replacing the Indian rupee symbol with the Tamil word .

Senior BJP leaders including H Raja, Pon Radhakrishnan, BJP Mahila Morcha chief and Coimbatore South MLA Vanathi Srinivasan, the party's legislators Dr C Saraswathi, MR Gandhi, Nainar Nagenthran and functionaries including Vinoj P Selvam and Amar Prasad Reddy were detained.

Meanwhile, the main opposition AIADMK moved a resolution seeking removal of Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker M Appavu from his office but was defeated with the ruling DMK and its allies opposing the motion. While 63 members supported it, 154 MLAs voted against the motion.

"People will laugh at such a motion being moved," Stalin said. *—PTI*

Oppn walks out of RS over voter ID discussion

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Opposition parties, including the Congress and the Trinamool Congress (TMC), staged a walkout from the Rajya Sabha on March 17 after their request for a discussion on the Election Commission's alleged lapses in issuing duplicate voter ID cards was denied.

Deputy Chairman Harivansh ruled that the notices given under rule 267 for a special discussion were not in accordance with the chair's directives. Despite vocally pressing for the matter to be addressed, Opposition MPs were disallowed from speaking, leading to their exit from the proceedings.

Notably, ten MPs had submitted notices, with specific demands for discussions on multiple duplicate Electronic Electoral Photo Identity Cards and the implications of the upcoming delimitation exercise for southern states. Alongside TMC and Congress representatives, MPs from various other parties raised issues including increased atrocities against Scheduled Castes and increased drug addiction among youth.

Harivansh PHOTO: PTI

Railway budget under fire from oppn

In a separate session in the Lok Sabha, the opposition condemned the Railway Ministry's management, labelling the latest budget as "failed." Congress MP Varsha Gaikwad criticised claims of record-breaking allocations, asserting that the Railways remains in poor condition

TMC MP Shatabdi Roy highlighted the inadequacies faced by passengers, while other members echoed concerns over railway safety and operational efficiency. Union Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw defended the department, citing substantial recruitment efforts and ongoing improvements in services. *—PTI*

T'gana promises 42% quota for OBC

HYDERABAD, 17 MARCH

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on Monday put the OBC population in the state at 56.36 per cent and stated that the government has resolved to ensure 42 per cent reservation for this group in education, jobs, and employment.

Reddy said on X, "Telangana is proud to lead the social revolution in India. It is my honour to announce the longest pending demand of the subaltern groups since Indian Independence, the yearning of our brothers & sisters belonging to the Backward Castes, on being counted & recognised in an official census - has finally found deliverance."

"We are now resolving to ensure 42 percent reservations for this Group in all walks of life - education, jobs and employment & political representation," Reddy said.

"Based on the most scientific, methodically rigorous, and excruciating efforts of our people, we can say that the OBCs population in Telangana is 56.36 percent," CM Reddy said.

Earlier in the day, Reddy stated in the Telangana Assembly that he will take "proactive measures" to "achieve" 42 per cent reservation for the Backward Classes (BCs) in education and employment.

Revanth Reddy PHOTO: ANI

Meanwhile, AIMIM members staged a walk out from the Assembly alleging that their questions are ingnored or changed, apart from expressing dissatisfaction over other things with regard to the functioning of the House.

Alleging that the House is not being conducted properly and that questions are being stopped, changed, and not answered properly—an attitude that "kills democracy and the House"—floor leader Akbaruddin Owaisi announced that his party members would be walking out. —ANI/PTI

Court drops charges against 2 scribes over 'abusive content'

Hyderabad, 17 March

A Hyderabad court on Monday dropped a key charge of 'organised crime' against two journalists who were arrested for posting allegedly abusive content against the Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy. The court said that charges of organised crime cannot be issued against the journalists as there were no monetary transactions and no evidence of organised crime. Two journalists - Pogadadanda Revathi, Managing Director of Pulse News, and Thanvi Yadav, a reporter for the same channel - were arrested by the Hyderabad Police's Cyber Crime division last week. A third individual - the user of an X account titled 'NippuKodi' - is also under scrutiny. *—Agencies*

Curfew imposed in Manipur district after assault of tribal leader

IMPHAL/ CHURACHANDPUR, 17 MARCH

Curfew was imposed in Manipur's Churachandpur on Monday as a precautionary measure following clashes between Hmar and Zomi communities. This comes a day after a Hmar tribal leader was assaulted amidst demands from the community to identify the perpetrators.

"Curfew was imposed in Churachandpur as a precautionary measure following the clashes," an official said.

Emphasising the urgent need to maintain law and order and prevent any untoward incidents, the order prohibited unauthorised processions or unlawful assemblies of five or more persons. It also banned the carrying of arms or instruments that can be used as weapons, including sticks, rods and stones.

According to police, protesters have been attempting to enforce a shutdown in the town, urging shops to close immediately. Groups of men carrying sticks were also seen patrolling the streets. There have been reports of stone pelting by mobs in some areas, they said.

General secretary Richard Hmar of Hmar Inpui, one of the apex bodies of the tribe, was attacked by a group of men at around 7.30pm on Sunday. *—PTI*

'MODI ECHOES TRUMP ON GLOBAL ORGANISATIONS'

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Congress party has sharply criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his remarks during a podcast with American host Lex Fridman, suggesting that Modi is excessively trying to appease former US President Donald Trump by echoing his sentiments on global organisations.

In the podcast, Modi highlighted the need for collaboration to address global challenges and discussed the relevance of institutions like the United Nations, stating they have struggled to adapt over time. Congress general secretary in charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, accused the PM of mimicking Trump, asserting, "Mr. Modi clearly is going out of his way to keep Mr. Trump in good humour." Ramesh questioned the perceived irrelevance of international bodies, asking if organisations like the WHO and WTO are not beneficial for India.

The Congress leader urged for "minimum self-glorification and maximum governance" in light of the current economic challenges and regional volatility.

Ramesh further condemned the PM for avoiding press conferences and undermining democratic accountability. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

AMID DEMOLITION THREATS

Will protect Aurangzeb's tomb: Fadnavis

THANE/MUMBAI/ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR 17 MARCH

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday said the government is obligated to protect Aurangzeb's tomb but it won't allow attempts to glorify his legacy through "mahima mandan".

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) on Monday staged protests at various government offices and submitted memorandums for the removal of Aurangzeb's grave in Khuldabad.

In the memorandum, the VHP stated that Aurangzeb had killed two sons of Sikh guru Guru Gobind Singh because they refused to convert, tortured and killed Maratha warrior king Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and demolished temples in Kashi, Mathura, Somnath.

"Any memorial of Aurangzeb is a symbol of pain and slavery, so the grave should be demolished completely," it said.

He said while the government is obligated to protect Aurangzeb's tomb as a declared protected site, its preservation is a matter of historical record rather than reverence.

"It is unfortunate that the government has to take responsibility for the protection of Aurangzeb's grave, despite his history of persecution. However, I assure you, if any attempt is made to glorify his legacy through 'mahima mandan', it will not succeed," the CM said after inaugurating a temple dedicated to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in Thane district on his birth anniversary.

Meanwhile, Legislators of the ruling Mahayuti condemned state Congress president Harshvardhan Sapkal's remark comparing Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis Aurangzeb and demanded strict action against him.

Sapkal had on Sunday said, "Aurangzeb was a cruel ruler. Today, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis is an equally cruel ruler."

Given the political turmoil, the police administration increased security near Aurangzeb's tomb, making it mandatory for visitors to furnish their identity cards before entering the historic site. Over 100 security forces have been deployed at the site. *—PTI*

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis pays tribute to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj PHOTO: PTI

Himachal budget: Milk prices up by Rs 6 per litre

SHIMLA, 17 MARCH

Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Monday presented the annual Budget for 2025-26, emphasising the government's commitment to promoting religious and eco-tourism while exploring lesser-known tourist destinations. This marks Sukhu's third annual Budget, as the revenue deficit grant has been reduced and GST compensation discontinued.

The Chief Minister revealed that the state's debt liability has now reached Rs 1,04,729 crore, with Rs 29,046 crore accumulated under the current government. He noted that 70 per cent of the loans taken over the past two years were used to service debts from the previous administration, leaving Rs 8,093 crore for development activities.

In agricultural measures, Sukhu announced an increase in the minimum support price for cow milk from Rs 45 to Rs 51 per litre, and buffalo milk from Rs 55 to Rs 61 per litre. Aiming to include 100,000 farmers in natural farming, he also set a minimum support price of Rupees 90 per kg for naturally grown turmeric.

Other initiatives include an increase in daily wages for MGNREGA workers and the establishment of a Special Task Force to combat drug abuse. *—PTI*

Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu PHOTO: PTI

- Sukhu increased the daily wages for MGNREGA workers and set an MSP of Rs 90 per kg for naturally grown turmeric

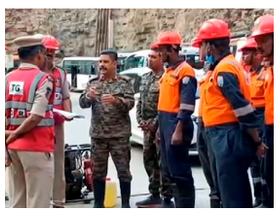


PHOTO: PTI

Search continues on day 24 in T'gana tunnel

NAGARKURNOOL, 17 MARCH

The search operation to locate seven individuals trapped in the partially collapsed SLBC tunnel entered its 24th day on Monday. Officials are intensifying efforts at the identified 'D1 and D2' points, where human presence is suspected, by increasing the number of rescue personnel. Teams from South Central Railway, NDRF, SDRF, state-owned Singareni Collieries, and rat miners are conducting the search using advanced technology and expert input. The body of Gurpreet Singh, a TBM operator, was recovered on 9 March and has been returned to his family in Punjab. The incident, which occurred on 22 February, resulted in a eight individuals getting trapped inside the tunnel, with seven still unaccounted for. *—PTI*

Forest officials shoot dead injured tiger in Idukki

IDUKKI, 17 MARCH

Forest officials on Monday shot dead a tiger in self-defence as it attacked them during a tranquilising mission in Vandiperiyar, Idduki, Kerala. The injured big cat, which strayed from nearby forests, triggered panic among locals as it killed some domestic animals in Granby estate area in the recent days. Though the wildlife officials fired tranquiliser shots when it was spotted inside a tea estate in the morning, the tiger suddenly charged at them forcing the team to open fire for self defence. The dead tiger was over 10 years old and looked very week with injuries in one of its legs, department sources added. Authorities had earlier claimed that they had successfully tranquilised the animal. *—PTI*

Goa varsity suspends professor over paper leaks

PANAJI, 17 MARCH

The Goa University Vice-Chancellor Harilal B Menon on Monday suspended assistant professor Dr Pranav P Naik from the School of Physical and Applied Sciences for leaking a question paper to a female student. Menon on Monday said he had already constituted a fact-finding committee, which would submit a report within 48 hours. Two complaints were lodged with police against the assistant professor, accusing him of leaking the question paper. While the first complaint was lodged on Sunday by activist Kashinath Shetye and other like-minded citizens, the Congress-affiliated National Students Union of India (NSUI) lodged a complaint on Monday. *—PTI*

Rs 8.47 cr gold seized at Mumbai airport

MUMBAI, 17 MARCH

The Mumbai Customs has seized more than 10 kg of gold valued at Rs 8.47 crore in four operations at the international airport here and arrested five persons, including three private airport staff members, officials said on Monday. The seizures were made between 13 and 15 March from three private staffers and from the garbage bin of an international flight. In the case of gold seized from the staffers, they were concealed in their clothes and undergarments, in oval-shaped capsules, officials said. In the fourth case, Customers officers during the rummaging of garbage bags containing trash of the lavatories and pantry of an international flight found two black pouches containing pure gold dust in wax form valued at Rs 2.53 crore, officials said. Further investigations are underway. *—PTI*

SC junks plea for new probe in RG Kar case

Court says parents can approach Calcutta HC

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed the plea seeking a fresh CBI investigation into the rape and murder of a doctor at RG Kar Hospital and Medical College in Kolkata. The plea was filed by the parents of the victim.

The court noted that the parents had the option of pursuing the matter before the Calcutta High Court their plea for a further court-monitored CBI probe into the gruesome incident.

"Without making comments, we dispose of the application observing that the applicants have the liberty to pursue the proceedings before the high court," the bench said.

The bench headed by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna said it will consider in the week commencing 13 May the aspect related to recommendations and suggestions on preventing gender-based violence and developing safety protocols for doctors and medical staff at hospitals across the nation with the court-appointed national task force (NTF).

The appex court said it will consider the aspects related to the NTF on 13 May PHOTO: PTI

A separate plea of the parents seeking further court-monitored CBI probe into the incident is already pending in the Calcutta High Court which recently asked them to obtain clarification from the top court.

The heinous crime had triggered prolonged protests in West Bengal and a nationwide outrage. *—PTI*

SC: Manipur cases to be tried in Guwahati

Extends panel overseeing rehabilitation

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Monday said the trial of the Manipur ethnic violence cases, probed by the CBI, would be conducted in Guwahati, Assam, where it was transferred to earlier.

Keeping in mind the "overall environment in Manipur and the need for ensuring a fair process of criminal justice administration", the apex court transferred, 27 cases, having various offences, including the sexual assault case of the two women seen in a viral video being paraded naked to Assam. 20 of the cases were related to charges of molestation, rape, murder while three were related to looted weapon.

The bench posted the next hearing in the week of 21 July.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna also extended till 31 July, 2025, the tenure of a committee headed by Justice Gita Mittal. The panel was set up to oversee relief and rehabilitation of the victims of ethnic violence in Manipur.

Security conducts search operations in Manipur to recover illegal weapons PHOTO: PTI

On 9 December, last year, the bench directed the Manipur government to submit a detailed sealed-cover report on the number of properties that were fully or partially burnt, looted, or encroached upon during the ongoing ethnic violence in the state. It had emphasised the need for the state to address the grievances of the displaced persons. *—PTI*

Justic Joymalya Bagchi takes oath as SC judge

Justice Joymalya Bagchi took the oath of office as a Supreme Court Judge on Monday. Justice Bagchi will have a tenure of more than six years in, during which he will also serve as the CJI. He has served as a high court judge for more than 13 years stands as one of the most senior high court judges. *—PTI*

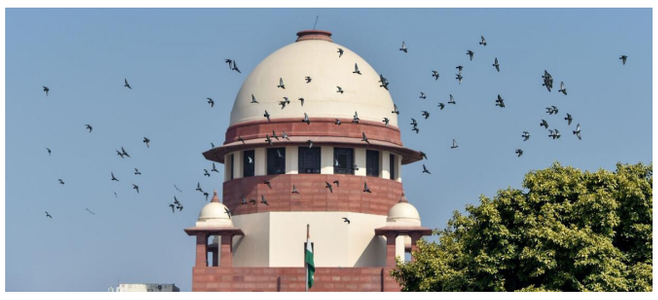
SC seeks Centre's reply on CAG appointment

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Monday sought the Centre's response on a PIL seeking that the current practice of appointment of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India solely by the executive and the prime minister be declared violative of the Constitution.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh issued notice on the PIL filed by an NGO, Centre for Public Interest Litigation.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the NGO, said that the question is of independence of the institution and alleged that audits by CAG of states like Maharashtra, where the BJP is in power, are being stalled.



The PIL also sought direction of the court mandating that the CAG shall be appointed by the President in consultation with an independent and neutral selection committee comprising of the prime minister, the leader of the opposition and the chief justice of India and in a transparent manner.

It said that the direction for appointment of the CAG should be similar to the appointment of other bodies, including Information Commissions and the Central Vigilance Commission, to ensure . *—PTI*

Contempt notice issued to Delhi Principal Secy

The court issued a contempt notice to the Delhi Principal Secretary (Home) for failing to decide on the plea of Sukhdev Yadav, one of the convicts in the Nitish Katara murder case. The court said that without contempt notices, government authorities do not act on cases. *—PTI*

Police personnel and others gather after a suspect was killed in an exchange of fire with police, in Amritsar PHOTO: PTI

Amritsar temple blast suspect killed in police shoot-out

CHANDIGARH, 17 MARCH

A suspect linked to the recent blast outside a temple in Amritsar was killed in a police shootout on Monday, according to a senior police official. Another suspect managed to escape, prompting an ongoing manhunt.

The explosion occurred on 51 March outside the Thakur Dwara Temple when an individual reportedly threw an explosive device, damaging part of the temple's wall and shattering nearby windows. The deceased suspect has been identified as Gursidak Singh from Bal village, while the second suspect, known as Vishal, hails from Rajasansi.

Amritsar Police Commissioner Gurpreet Singh Bhullar detailed that the suspects, on a motorcycle, refused to stop when approached by a police team and opened fire, injuring head constable Gurpreet Singh in the left arm and striking Inspector Amolak Singh's turban. The suspects fired five shots at the officers, who retaliated in self-defence.

Gursidak Singh was hit during the exchange and later succumbed to his injuries at a local hospital, while Vishal fled the scene. Gursidak had previously been released from jail after involvement in two armed robbery cases, while Vishal faces charges of attempted murder.

The Punjab Police believe the incident may have connections to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), heightening concerns in the region. Fortunately, no civilians were injured in the blast, although residents reported widespread panic. *—PTI*

Chandrayaan-5 has Centre's nod: ISRO head

CHENNAI, 17 MARCH

The Centre has recently accorded approval for the ambitious Chandrayaan-5 mission to study the Moon, ISRO Chairman V Narayanan said.

Taking over as the Chairman of the Bengaluru-headquartered Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), Narayanan said that unlike the Chandrayaan-3 mission which carried the 25kg rover 'Prayagyaan', the Chandrayaan-5 mission would carry a 250kg rover to study the Moon's surface.

The Chandrayaan mission consists of studying the lunar surface. Chandrayaan-1 successfully launched in 2008 took chemical, mineralogical and photo-geologic mapping of the Moon. The Chandrayaan-2 mission was 98 per cent success but just two per cent of the Mission could not be achieved in the final stages.

ISRO chief V Narayanan PHOTO: PTI

Still the onboard high resolution camera on Chandrayaan-2 is sending hundreds of images, Narayanan said.

Chandrayaan-3 Mission is a follow-on mission to demonstrate end-to-end capability in safe landing and roving on the lunar surface. *—PTI*

Centre, states get HC notice for using woman's pic in govt ads

MUMBAI, 17 MARCH

The Bombay High Court has deprecated the "commercial exploitation" and illegal use of a woman's photograph without her consent in government advertisements and issued notices to the Centre and four state governments.

The woman, Namrata Ankush Kawale, in her plea said her picture taken by a photographer, an acquaintance, was uploaded on the website 'Shutterstock.com' without her consent and knowledge.

The photo has since then been used unauthorisedly by the state governments of Maharashtra, Telangana, Karnataka and Odisha and the Union Ministry of Rural Development and some private entities on their websites, hoardings and other advertisements, she alleged.

A division bench of Justices G S Kulkarni and Advait Sethna, in its order on March 10, said the issues raised in the plea were "quite serious, considering the contemporary times of an electronic era and social media".

"Prima facie, it appears to be a commercial exploitation of the petitioner's photograph," the HC said.

The bench issued notice to Shutterstock, a US based company that hosts a website with royalty-free stock photographs, and various state governments, including Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana and Odisha. *—PTI*

8 held in MP for beating cop to death

BHOPAL, 17 MARCH

The police have arrested eight individuals in connection with the fatal mob attack in Madhya Pradesh's Mauganj district, which resulted in the deaths of a policeman and a tribal man.

The search for additional suspects is ongoing, according to senior police officials.

The tragedy occurred when a group of tribals allegedly abducted a man named Sunny Dwivedi and later attacked a police team attempting to rescue him, leading to Gautam's death.

Responding to the incident, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav mandated rigorous action against the perpetrators and offered financial assistance of Rupees 1 crore to Gautam's family.

The chief minister also announced that Gautam would receive martyr status for his sacrifice in the line of duty. *—PTI*

CHEETAH, 4 CUBS RELEASED INTO KUNO NATIONAL PARK

SHEOPUR, 17 MARCH

Cheetah Gamini and her four cubs were released into the wild at the Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh on Monday, an official said.

With this, the number of cheetahs in the wild in KNP has gone up to 17, while nine felines are staying in the enclosures.

Gamini, the South African female cheetah, and her four cubs (two male and two females, aged 12 months) have been successfully released in Khajuri forest area of the KNP in Sheopur district.

With this release, there are now 17 cheetahs (including 11 cubs born on Indian soil) in the wild in the Kuno National Park, a released said. *—PTI*

FOR FEE HIKE & BENEFITS

Kerala ASHA workers storm Secretariat

T'PURAM, 17 MARCH

Hundreds of ASHA workers, who have been staging a protest for over a month intensified their agitation by laying a siege to the state's Secretariat.

A section of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers has been protesting for the last 36 days seeking post-retirement benefits and a hike in their honorarium.

As they are yet to get any assurance from the authorities, the agitators today laid a siege to the Secretariat by blocking its various gates, in the heart of the city.

After gathering at the protest venue, they moved towards the state's administrative hub, squatted on the road and raised slogans.

Security was intensified in and around the Secretariat and over 800 police personnel were deployed to prevent the protesters from entering Secretariat.

ASHA workers take out a rally in front of the Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, on Monday PHOTO: PTI

- Over 800 police personnel were deployed to prevent any protesters from entering the Secretariat, as ASHA workers continued their long struggle

Police said there was no change to the normal functioning of the Secretariat.

One of the protesting ASHA workers, from the neighbouring Kollam district, said they won't end the ongoing agitation untill the state government accepts their demands.

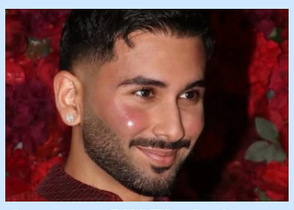
"How can we take our lives forward with this meagre income. I cannot live anymore with this poor honorarium at a time when prices of all essential commodities are skyrocketing," she said. *—PTI*

Orry, 7 others booked for drinking at Vaishno Devi

JAMMU, 17 MARCH

Social media influencer Orhan Awatramani, popularly known as Orry, was one of eight individuals booked by the Jammu and Kashmir Police for allegedly consuming alcohol at a hotel in Katra, the base camp for the pilgrimage to the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Reasi district, Jammu and Kashmir.

The FIR against the group was registered for "violating the law of the land" after police received a complaint on 15 March regarding guests consuming alcohol on hotel premises. A police statement indicated that a team has been formed to apprehend the individuals for "hurting the sentiments of people."



Orry PHOTO: Instagram

According to a police officer, the eight individuals, including Orry, were found consuming liquor despite being informed that alcohol and non-vegetarian food were prohibited on-site due to the hotel's proximity to the religious site. Those named in the FIR are Anastasila Arzamaskina, Darshan Singh, Parth Raina, Ritick Singh, Rashi Dutta, Rakshita Bhogal, and Shagun Kohli. *—PTI*

ST PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

St. Patrick's Day was marked with boisterous parades and celebrations in Manhattan among many other cities in US on Monday. The rolling celebration which is now in its 264th year, saw 2 million spectators. St. Patrick's Day or Feast of Saint Patrick is a cultural holiday celebrated on the death anniversary of Saint Patrick, the foremost patron saint of Ireland.
PHOTO: SREENGRAB

India eyes a 'good' trade deal with New Zealand

Some have said Christopher Luxon's pledge to get a free trade deal between New Zealand and India over the line in his first term as Prime Minister was overly optimistic. But not all trade deals are the same, and Luxon may yet get to claim bragging rights.

He is already managing expectations, saying a "good" deal will be better than waiting a long time for a "perfect" one. And with formal negotiations confirmed not long after Luxon touched down in New Delhi, we can perhaps expect genuine movement.

At the same time, India's negotiating style is notoriously rigid, with its bilateral investment treaty model having proved a stumbling block to deals with many other nations or blocs, including the UK and European Union.

New Zealand first held formal negotiations with India over a decade ago. But talks derailed in 2015 over the inclusion of dairy products in any agreement. We can be fairly sure this will be the compromise Luxon's government is ready to make now.

One model might be Australia's Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement, which leaves out dairy, too. And New Zealand was able to sign a free trade deal with China in 2008 that excluded diary, with those restrictions removed in a 2022 upgrade.

Beyond the economic implications, of course, lie domestic political calculations. Luxon needs a win to counter flatlining poll numbers and speculation about his leadership future. Good news in India offers just that.

Using diplomatic language that plays up New Zealand being part of the Indo-Pacific region – rather than the traditional Western alliance – will be essential.

In the context of an imminent "Asian Century", and the region becoming a crucial zone for economic and military power, New Zealand also provides a strategic pathway into the Pacific, where India is becoming increasingly involved. All of this will influence Luxon's keynote address today at the 10th Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship multilateral conference on global politics and economics. He is the first leader not governing a European country to make such a speech, and is also the chief guest at the dialogue.

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon with Indian counterpart Narendra Modi in New Delhi ***PHOTO: PTI***

Luxon is already on the record as saying New Zealand and India are "very aligned" on Indo-Pacific security and concerns over Chinese regional influence, with scope for more joint defence exercises.

This linkage between security and trade mirrors Wellington's recent relations with Beijing, which have become increasingly difficult to navigate.

But there is a long way to go. In 2024, India-New Zealand trade was worth a combined NZ$3.14 billion – a fraction of the $208.46 billion generated by trade with China in the same year.

Nevertheless, Luxon and his Ministers have made undeniable progress. His "recalibration of a relationship that has long been neglected" bore fruit in October 2025 when he met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the ASEAN summit, and the countries announced their intention to take the relationship to "greater heights".

The previous Labour government helped set the scene with a succession of high-level diplomatic visits and parliamentary exchanges. In 2023, the Indian government described relations with New Zealand as having "an upward trajectory". And there are clearly good foundations to build on – especially the 292,000 people of Indian ethnicity in New Zealand, who contribute USD10 billion to the New Zealand economy.

Trade is ripe for expansion as New Zealand primarily exports wool, iron and steel, aluminium, fruits and nuts, wood pulp and recovered paper, and imports Indian pharmaceuticals, machinery, precious metals and stones, textiles, vehicles and clothing.

There's potential to grow trade with India in tourism, especially attractive to India's growing middle class, and collaboration on space technology, renewable energy and agritech. There were 8,000 Indian students in New Zealand last year, a number that may well grow given a relative drop in student numbers from China. With the US and UK becoming more hostile to immigration, New Zealand can offer a relatively safe and tolerant alternative.

In many ways, India is the new China. In 2023, India's GDP was US$14.54 trillion, making it the world's fourth largest economy. New Delhi is on the cusp of becoming a great power, and is being courted by all countries, big and small.

As such, while Luxon has momentum on a trade deal, he is also part of a long queue. Given the relative power imbalance between the two countries, the weight of expectation sits squarely on his shoulders.

—The Conversation

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR ساڈا

Why is US intensifying its strikes on Houthis?

The United States President Donald Trump has launched a new campaign of intense airstrikes targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels.

This weekend's strikes killed at least 53 people, including children, and wounded others. The campaign is likely to continue, part of a wider pressure campaign by Trump now targeting the Houthis' main benefactor Iran as well.

The Houthi rebels attacked over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels and killing four sailors, from November 2023 until January 2025. Their leadership described the attacks as aiming to end the Israeli war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The campaign also greatly raised the Houthis' profile in the wider Arab world and tamped down on public criticism against their human rights abuses and crackdowns on dissent and aid workers.

Trump, writing on his social media platform Truth Social, said his administration targeted the Houthis over their "unrelenting campaign of piracy, violence and terrorism." He noted the disruption Houthi attacks have caused through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, key waterways for energy and cargo shipments between Asia and Europe through Egypt's Suez Canal.

Under former President Joe Biden, the US and the United Kingdom began a series of airstrikes against the Houthis starting in January 2024. A December report by The International Institute for Strategic Studies said the US and its partners struck the Houthis over 260 times up to that point.

US military officials during that period acknowledged having a far-wider target list for possible strikes.

The Trump administration, however, appears willing to go after more targets, based on the weekend's strikes and public remarks made by officials.

What could the new US strikes mean for the wider Mideast? In two words: More attacks. The Houthis said last week they'll again target "Israeli" ships travelling through Mideast waterways like the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, because of Israel's blocking of aid to the Gaza Strip. No rebel attack targeting commercial shipping has been reported as of Monday morning.

However, the new US campaign likely could inspire Houthi attacks at sea or on land beyond American warships. The rebels previously targeted oil infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, two countries deeply involved in Yemen's war since 2015.

Gulf Arab countries "will distance themselves from ongoing hostilities but now face threats to their major oil infrastructure. The Houthis will want to hit President Donald Trump where it hurts, oil prices."

Iran long has armed the Houthis, who are members of Islam's minority Shiite Zaydi sect, which ruled Yemen for 1,000 years until 1962. Tehran routinely denies arming the rebels, despite physical evidence, numerous seizures and experts tying the weapons back to Iran.

That's likely because Tehran wants to avoid sanctions for violating a United Nations arms embargo on the Houthis.

The Houthis now form the strongest group within Iran's self-described "Axis of Resistance."

Allied Shiite militias in Iraq largely have kept their heads down since the US launched retaliatory attacks last year over a drone attack that killed three American troops and injured at least 34 others at a military base in Jordan.

While Iranian state television aired footage of civilian casualties from the weekend strikes in Yemen, top political leaders stayed away from suggestion Tehran itself would get involved in the fight.

Revolutionary Guard Chief Gen Hossein Salami notably underscored the Houthis made their own decisions — while not offering any warning over what would happen if the strikes killed any members of the Guard's expeditionary Quds Force, who are believed to actively support the rebels on the ground.

Trump's national security adviser Mike Waltz, said to ABC's "This Week" on Sunday, warned Guard officials training the Houthis "will be on the table too" as possible targets for attack.

Meanwhile, Iran is still trying to determine how to respond to a letter from Trump aiming to restart negotiations over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear programme.

The attacks on the Houthis are "a not-so-subtle signal to Iran, as President Trump has been unequivocal in his insistence that Iran return to the negotiating table to deal with its nuclear programme," the New York-based Soufan Centre said in an analysis Monday. *—PTI*

The Houthi rebels who attacked over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones marching a rally ***PHOTO: PTI***

Online army still fights for Ukraine even after 3 years of war

More than three years after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a 30-day ceasefire between the two warring countries may be imminent. But much more needs to happen before a just and lasting peace is achieved.

The Russian-Ukraine war is one of the most visible, analysed and documented wars in human history. Since 24 February 2022, millions of Ukrainian citizens, military personnel, journalists, officials and civil society activists have shared first-hand eyewitness accounts, updates, commentaries and opinions on the war.

Around the world, many online communities have also sprung into action to counter Russian propaganda and raise awareness of what is happening in Ukraine.

We have been studying these communities for the past three years, conducting hours of interviews with members and observing their activity on social media. To conduct much of this research and connect with members, we had to join some of these communities – a common requirement for researchers working in online settings.

Our work reveals a range of skills and strategies activists use in the online fight against Russia. It shows how social media users can mobilise during times of war and other international crises and have a material impact offline.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine was accompanied by online disinformation and propaganda campaigns. The aims of these campaigns are to sow discord, distrust and dismay among both Ukrainian and international audiences by, for example, depicting Ukraine as a failed state ruled by Nazis.

Ukraine responded by launching its own information operations to counter Russian propaganda, appeal for help from the world and maintains the security of its defensive operations.

In some cases, social media platforms have aided the Russian cause. At the same time, they have suppressed evidence of war crimes. For example, in the first year of the Russian invasion, independent investigative journalism organisations such as Disclose documented thousands of war crimes committed by Russian soldiers against Ukrainian civilians. These crimes included murder, torture, physical and sexual violence, forced relocation, looting, and damage to civilian infrastructure such as schools and hospitals.

Workers clean up a residential area after being hit by Russian missiles in Ukraine ***PHOTO: PTI***

Much of this content included graphic imagery, violence and offensive language. As a result, it was permanently removed from platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. On the other hand, content containing disinformation evaded moderation. For example, a 2023 investigation by the BBC revealed thousands of fake TikTok accounts created as part of a Russian propaganda campaign spreading lies about Ukrainian officials.

This often led to a distorted information environment online. Russian disinformation was visible, while the true extent of Russian violence against Ukrainians was hidden. In this context, thousands of internet users formed online communities to creatively support Ukraine without attracting the attention of content moderators. This isn't new or unique to the war in Ukraine.

It started in May 2022 when a young man with the online name Kama mashed up a Reddit meme of a Shiba Inu dog nicknamed Cheems and a picture of a dilapidated Russian tank. This was a celebration of a Ukrainian battlefront victory. It was only intended to mock Russia.

But as Kama changed his profile picture to the meme, the trend started spreading quickly to his followers on X. They quickly grew into an online collective dedicated to fighting Russia online.

In many similar posts across Facebook, X and TikTok, users share selfies or other images to achieve high visibility while calling followers to action. In most cases, this involves raising funds for urgent military or humanitarian efforts to benefit Ukraine.

Another common strategy is storytelling. Some users share amusing or ridiculous anecdotes from their lives before closing with a donation request.

These requests often have a clear target and beneficiary. They are also often time-sensitive. Through collaborations with Ukraine's official fundraising platform, the North Atlantic Fella Organisation has collected more than USD700,000 towards Ukraine's defence.

Members of the North Atlantic Fella Organisation also try to combat Russian propaganda and disinformation.

Instead of arguing in good faith with highly visible disinformation-spreading accounts members try to derail the disinformation campaigns. They highlight their ridiculousness by responding with memes and jokes. They call this practice "shitposting".

People spreading Russian disinformation often find themselves annoyed by the swarms of "meme dogs" in their replies. This has led some to respond aggressively. In turn, this has allowed North Atlantic Fella Organisation members to report them for violation of X's terms of service and have their accounts suspended, as our forthcoming research documents.

However, from late 2022 onward, North Atlantic Fella Organisation members we interviewed as a part of our research reported decreased effectiveness of X's response to problematic user conduct. This was soon after tech billionaire Elon Musk bought the social media platform.

Despite this, members continue to support each other and develop playful tactics to ensure they remain visible on the platform. It seems war will continue online for as long as Russia wages its war on Ukraine's territory.

—The Conversation

Serbia denies use of sonic weapon on protesters

BELGRADE, 17 MARCH

Serbian officials denied that security forces used a military-grade sonic weapon to disperse and scare protesters at a huge anti-government rally in the capital. On Saturday, at least 100,000 people descended on the capital for a mass rally as a culmination of month-long protest against Serbia's populist president Aleksadar Vucic and his government. Footage from the rally show people standing during 15 minutes of silence for the rail station disaster while suddenly experiencing a whooshing sound that immediately triggered panic and a brief stampede. Those exposed to the weapon experience sharp ear pain, disorientation and panic. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FB

Lanka court rejects police chief's plea for stay on arrest

COLOMBO, 17 MARCH

Sri Lanka's suspended police chief Deshabandu Tennakoon on Monday lost his appeal at the Court of Appeal seeking an order to stay the arrest warrant issued against him by a local court. Refusing his plea without hearing, the two-judge bench, headed by Justice (Acting President) Mohamed Laffar, also directed the police to execute the arrest warrant issued against Tennakoon. He was appointed as the police chief in November 2023 despite him being found guilty of torturing a person in custody by the Supreme Court in a fundamental rights petition. Tennakoon, as the inspector general, had sent police officers from the Colombo Crime Division (CCD) to the resort hotel in Weligama for a raid in connection with illegal drugs. However, the Weligama police, unaware of the undercover operation, opened fire at the CCD vehicle, killing an officer. The police chief was suspended in July 2024 from functioning by the Supreme Court.—*PTI*

Syria to join donor conference to revive economy

BRUSSELS, 17 MARCH

The European Union hosts a donor conference for Syria on Monday to muster support to ensure a peaceful transition after President Bashar Assad was ousted by an insurgency last December. The Ninth edition of its kind, ministers and representatives from Western partners, as well as Syria's regional neighbours, other Arab countries and UN agencies will take part in the one-day meeting in Brussels which will be chaired by EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas. The gathering will seek to give impetus to Syria's economic recovery which was hampered by harsh western sanctions imposed during Assad's rule. —*PTI*

Pak Assembly calls special session to discuss security

ISLAMABAD, 17 MARCH

Pakistan Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq has convened an in-camera meeting of the Parliamentary Committee on National Security on Tuesday, amid a surge in terror attacks in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has asked the Assembly speaker to convene the security meeting at Parliament House on Tuesday at 1.30pm when the leadership will brief on the security situation, Dawn reported on Monday amidst reports that the Government was planning a massive operation against BLA (Balochistan Liberation Army). The military leadership will provide a comprehensive briefing to the parliamentary committee on the prevailing security situation, according to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office. —*PTI*

Trump, Putin may talk on Ukraine peace today

Europeans wary of Trump's affinity for Putin

WASHINGTON, 17 MARCH

President Donald Trump said he would speak to Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday as he pushes to end the war in Ukraine.

The US leader disclosed the upcoming conversation to reporters while flying from Florida to Washington on Air Force One on Sunday evening.

"We will see if we have something to announce maybe by Tuesday. I will be speaking to President Putin on Tuesday," Trump said. "A lot of work's been done over the weekend. We want to see if we can bring that war to an end."

Any such conversation could be a pivot point in the conflict and an opportunity for Trump to continue reorienting American foreign policy. European allies are wary of Trump's affinity for Putin and his hardline stance toward Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who faced sharp criticism when he visited the Oval Office a little more than two weeks ago.

US President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin
PHOTO: X

Although Russia failed in its initial goal to topple Ukraine with its invasion three years ago, it still controls large swaths of the country.

Trump said land and power plants are part of the conversation around bringing the war to a close.

"We will be talking about land. We will be talking about power plants," he said.

Trump described it as "dividing up certain assets."

Trump special envoy Steve Witkoff recently visited Moscow to advance negotiations, and he said earlier on Sunday that a call between Trump and Putin could come soon. —*PTI*

Canada looks at France to help tackle US tariffs

US annexation threat poses another concern

PARIS, 17 MARCH

New Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney arrived in Paris on Monday to meet with French President Emmanuel Macron, seeking support from one of Canada's oldest allies as tensions with the Trump administration continue.

This is Carney's first official foreign trip since he was sworn in on 14 March. He will next land in London where he will sit down with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and King Charles III, the head of state in Canada.

Carney has deliberately chosen the two European capital cities that shaped Canada's early existence. During his swearing-in ceremony, he noted the country was built on the bedrock of three peoples, French, English and Indigenous, and said Canada is fundamentally different from America and will "never, ever, in any way shape or form, be part of the United States."

This is Carney's first official foreign trip since he was sworn in as Prime Minister on 14 March
PHOTO: PTI

Since US President Donald Trump came to office, he has imposed whopping tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminium and repeatedly commented on turning Canada into the 51st state, infuriating Canadians and sparking a call to boycott US products across the country.

On Monday, a Canadian official briefed reporters on the plane before picking up Carney in Montreal, saying the purpose of the trip is to double down on partnerships with London and Paris. The official, who wished anonymity as he is not allowed to speak publicly, said Canada is a "good friend of the United States but we all know what is going on." —*PTI*

ZELENSKYY NAMES NEW CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF

KYIV, 17 MARCH

Ukraine leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy appointed Andrii Hnatov as the new chief of the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces, as the country looks to restructure and strengthen its military while It is engaged in combat in Russia's Kursk region and facing increasing pressure in Donetsk.

Hnatov replaced Anatoliy Barhylevych, who held the position since February 2024. The appointment was announced by the general staff via its Telegram channel Sunday.

"We are systematically transforming the Armed Forces of Ukraine to enhance their combat effectiveness," Defense Minister Rustem Umerov said.

Barhylevych will now serve as the general inspector of Ukraine's Defense Ministry. Umerov emphasized that Barhylevych would "remain part of the team," overseeing military standards and strengthening discipline in the army.

Oleksandr Syrskyi remains in place as commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces.

Zelenskyy has made frequent personnel changes within the Ukrainian government and military since Russia launched its-scale invasion in 2022. —*PTI*

US, Houthis vow escalation

CAIRO, 17 MARCH

The United States and Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen are both vowing escalation after the US launched airstrikes to deter the rebels from attacking military and commercial vessels on one of the world's busiest shipping corridors.

The Houthi-run Health Ministry said the overnight US strikes killed at least 53 people, including five women and two children, and wounded almost 100 in the capital of Sanaa and the northern province of Saada, the rebels' stronghold on the border with Saudi Arabia.

"We're not going to have these people controlling which ships can go through and which ones cannot. And so your question is, how long will this go on? It will go on until they no longer have the capability to do that," Secretary of State Marco Rubio told CBS on Sunday. He said these are not the one-off retaliation strikes the Biden administration carried out after Houthi attacks.

President Donald Trump on Saturday vowed to use "overwhelming lethal force" until the Houthis cease their attacks, and warned that Tehran would be held "fully accountable" for their actions.

US strikes killed at least 53 people, including five women and two children, and wounded almost 100 in the capital of Sanaa
PHOTO: PTI

The Houthis have repeatedly targeted international shipping in the Red Sea, sinking two vessels, in what they call acts of solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza, where Israel has been at war with Hamas, another Iranian ally.

The attacks stopped when a Israel-Hamas ceasefire took hold in January — a day before Trump took office — but last week the Houthis said they would renew attacks against Israeli vessels after Israel cut off the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza this month. —*PTI*

PAK, BHUTAN AMONG 41 NATIONS ON TRUMP'S BAN LIST

The Trump administration has prepared a "red" list of 11 countries whose citizens will be barred from entering the US. This is part of travel ban plan whose restrictions apply to 43 countries.

THE LIST IS DIVIDED INTO THREE SEPARATE GROUPS:

RED
Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen will be barred from entering US completely.

ORANGE
Rich businessmen from Belarus, Eritrea, Haiti, Laos, Myanmar, Pakistan, Russia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Turkmenistan will be allowed to enter but not people travelling on immigrant visas.

YELLOW
A total of 26 countries, including Pakistan, Angola, Liberia, Republic of Congo and Myanmar, will be considered for a partial suspension of US visa issuance if their governments "do not make efforts to address deficiencies within 60 days".

WHY HAS US RESTRICTED TRAVEL FROM BHUTAN?

Bhutan, one of the happiest countries in the world, is banned due to "national security concerns" and "irregular migration patterns", the US government said. There has been allegedly an unexpected increase in Bhutanese overstaying their visas or attempting to enter the US through unauthorised channels. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported a 37 per cent rise in Bhutanese visa violations in the past year, prompting stricter measures.

Trump defies court; deports hundreds

WASHINGTON, 17 MARCH

The Trump administration has transferred hundreds of immigrants to El Salvador even as a federal judge issued an order temporarily barring the deportations under an 18th century wartime declaration targeting Venezuelan gang members, officials said Sunday. Flights were in the air at the time of the ruling.

US District Judge James E. Boasberg issued an order Saturday temporarily blocking the deportations, but lawyers told him there were already two planes with immigrants in the air — one headed for El Salvador, the other for Honduras. Boasberg verbally ordered the planes be turned around, but they apparently were not and he did not include the directive in his written order.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, in a statement Sunday, responded to speculation about whether the administration was flouting court orders: "The administration did not refuse to comply' with a court order. The order, which had no lawful basis, was issued after terrorist TdA aliens had already been removed from U.S. territory."

The Trump administration has not identified the immigrants deported, provided any evidence they are in fact members of Tren de Aragua or that they committed any crimes in the United States. Video released by El Salvador's government Sunday showed men exiting airplanes onto an airport tarmac lined by officers in riot gear. The men, who had their hands and ankles shackled, struggled to walk as officers pushed their heads down to have them bend down at the waist. — *PTI*

Modi's podcast on Truth Social

WASHINGTON, 17 MARCH

US President Donald Trump on Monday shared a video link of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interaction with US-based popular podcaster and computer scientist Lex Fridman on his social media platform Truth Social.

During the interaction lasting over three hours, Modi on Sunday said he and Trump connect well as both put their respective countries first and asserted that their mutual trust remained unshaken even when the Republican leader was out of office during Joe Biden's presidency.

Modi said that Trump believes in "America First", and his motto is "nation first" or "India first". He said this similar spirit makes them connect well. — *PTI*

US tornado, wildfire death toll reach 37

PIEDMONT, 17 MARCH

Tornadoes wildfires and blinding dust continue to wreak havoc across parts of US as it decimated homes mounting the death toll to 37.

National Weather Service meteorologist Cody Snell said tornado watches remained in effect for portions of the Carolinas, east Georgia and northern Florida. He said that the main threat would be damaging winds, but there is the possibility of more tornadoes.

"As we go through the day today, there still is the potential for severe weather from, say, the upper Ohio Valley and western Pennsylvania down through the rest of the mid-Atlantic and Southeast as we have this cold front that's still moving across the country, and it won't clear the East Coast until later on tonight," Snell said.

At least three people were killed in central Alabama when multiple tornados swept across the state. Among those killed was an 82-year-old woman who was in a manufactured home that was destroyed by a twister, Dallas County Sheriff Michael L. Granthum said Sunday.

Missouri resident Dakota Henderson said he and others rescuing trapped neighbors found five bodies scattered in the debris Friday night outside what remained of his aunt's house in hard-hit Wayne County. Scattered twisters killed at least a dozen people in the state, authorities said. —*AP*

FREE SPEECH GOOF UP

Situation was volatile, says Indian student

NEW YORK, 17 MARCH

Ranjani Srinivasan, an Indian student at Columbia University who opted to "self-deport" after her visa was revoked, has described the terrifying moment when federal immigration agents first knocked on the door of her varsity apartment.

The immigration agents were searching for Srinivasan, 37, who had recently learned her student visa had been revoked. Srinivasan, an international PhD student from India, did not open the door when the three immigration agents knocked at it, the New York Times reported.

She was not home when the agents showed up the next night. She packed a few belongings, left her cat with a friend and jumped on a flight to Canada at LaGuardia Airport, the report added.

The Department of Homeland Security said it obtained video footage of Ranjani Srinivasan using the Customs and Border Protection Home App to self-deport on 11 March
PHOTO: PTI

When the agents returned a third time, this past Thursday night, and entered her apartment with a judicial warrant, she was gone.

"The atmosphere seemed so volatile and dangerous," Srinivasan told The New York Times. "So I just made a quick decision."

The Department of State had revoked Srinivasan's visa on 5 March. The Department of Homeland Security said it obtained video footage of Srinivasan using the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Home App to self-deport on 11 March.

Her visa was revoked for allegedly "advocating for violence and terrorism" and involvement in activities supporting Palestinian militant group Hamas. She entered the United States on a F-1 student visa as a doctoral student in Urban Planning at Columbia University, the Department of Homeland Security said in a statement on Friday. It added that Srinivasan was "involved in activities supporting" Hamas, a terrorist organisation in the US. —*PTI*

Rupee jumps 24 paise to close at 86.81 against USD

MUMBAI, 17 MARCH

The rupee appreciated 24 paise to close at 86.81 against the US dollar on Monday on positive domestic equities and weakness of the American currency in the overseas market. Forex traders said the rupee traded with a slight positive bias on weakness in the US dollar and positive global markets. However, surge in crude oil prices capped sharp gains for the local unit. At the interbank foreign exchange, rupee opened at 86.90 then touched an intra-day high of 86.76 and a low of 86.90 against the greenback. It ended at 86.81 against the dollar, registering a gain of 24 paise from its previous closing level. On Thursday, rupee surged 17 paise to settle at 87.05 against the US dollar. Forex, markets were closed on Friday on the occasion of Holi. *—PTI*

Banks write off bad loans worth ₹16L cr in last 10 yrs

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Banks have written off non-performing assets (NPAs) or bad loans worth about Rs 16.35 lakh crore in last 10 financial years, Parliament was informed on Monday. Highest amount of Rs 2,36,265 crore was written off during financial year 2018-19 while NPAs worth Rs 58,786 crore were written off in 2014-15, the lowest in the last 10 years. During 2023-24, banks wrote off bad loans of Rs 1,70,270 crore, lower than Rs 2,16,324 crore done in the previous financial year. Banks write off NPAs, including those in respect of which full provisioning has been made on completion of four years, as per the RBI guidelines and policy approved by banks' boards, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in a reply in the Lok Sabha. Such write-offs do not result in waiver of liabilities of borrowers and therefore, it does not benefit the borrower, she said. *—PTI*

Maruti Suzuki to hike vehicle prices by 4% from April

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Maruti Suzuki India on Monday said it will hike vehicle prices by up to 4 per cent from April in order to offset the impact of rising input costs. In light of rising input costs and operational expenses, the company has planned to increase the prices of its cars from April, the country's largest carmaker said in a regulatory filing. The price increase is expected to be up to 4 per cent and will vary depending on the model, it added. While the company continuously strives to optimise costs and minimise the impact on its customers, some portion of the increased cost may need to be passed on to the market, it noted. In January, the company had announced to hike prices by up to Rs 32,500 across various models from 1 February. *—PTI*

Airtel Payments Bank crosses 1B transaction mark

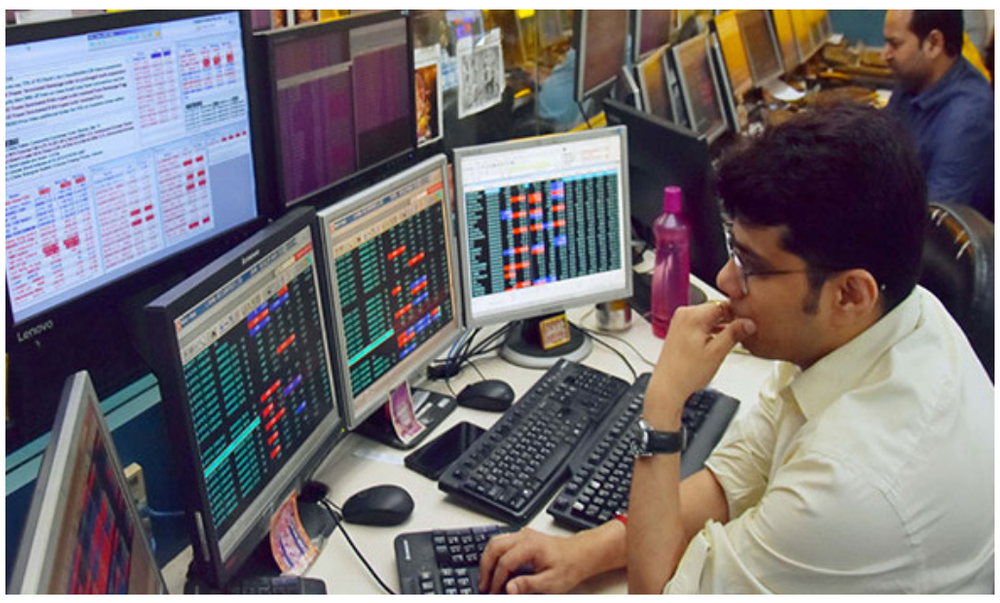
NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Airtel Payments Bank has surpassed one billion transactions on its platform in January 2025, reflecting a 47 per cent year-on-year growth in transaction volume across businesses, according to a top official. Anubrata Biswas, MD and CEO at Airtel Payments Bank said that the "milestone" underscores increasing adoption of digital banking and payment solutions. It also highlights the diverse business model that the bank has built over the years. The bank caters to three key customer segments, urban digital, underbanked, and industries and institutions. "The bank's extensive digital presence combined with its deep distribution of over 5,00,000 banking points across India has been instrumental in making its services accessible to millions of customers in both urban and rural areas. Today, the Bank's monthly transacting users exceed well above 100 million," Biswas said. *—PTI*

Sensex rebounds 341 pts on gains in banking shares

Nifty rises by 111.55 points or 0.50 per cent to 22,508.75

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH



Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, Axis Bank are the gainers **PHOTO: ANI**

Benchmark BSE Sensex rebounded by 341 points on Monday, snapping its five-day losing streak following buying in banking stocks and a sharp rally in global shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 341.04 points or 0.46 per cent to settle at 74,169.95 as 19 of its constituents ended in the green and 11 in the red. In intra-day trade, the benchmark jumped 547.44 points or 0.74 per cent to 74,376.35.

The NSE Nifty rose by 111.55 points or 0.50 per cent to 22,508.75.

From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finance, Adani Ports, ICICI Bank, Zomato and UltraTech Cement were among the biggest gainers.

However, ITC, Nestle, State Bank of India, Reliance Industries, Asian Paints and Tata Consultancy Services were among the laggards.

"Markets started the week on a positive note, gaining half a per cent as the consolidation phase continued. Strong global cues, along with buying interest in select heavyweights, particularly from the banking and financial sectors, led to a firm start, followed by a range-bound session," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.77 per cent, while smallcap index dipped 0.02 per cent. Among BSE sectoral indices, healthcare surged 1.12 per cent, commodities (0.92 per cent), metal (0.91 per cent), financial services (0.83 per cent), auto (0.80 per cent) and bankex (0.71 per cent).

Telecommunication, realty and FMCG were the laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory. Stock markets in Europe were trading in the green. US markets ended sharply higher on Friday.

"Despite a small hiccup, markets quickly gained ground to trade in positive territory as optimism across global markets aided recovery in local indices. However, with a lot of uncertainty surrounding the impact of US tariff policies on key economies, including India, investors would be watchful of the global events before taking any call," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. *—PTI*

IndusInd Bank had revealed an accounting discrepancy last week that could impact around 2.35 per cent of its net worth **PHOTO: X**

IndusInd Bank shares up 6% as RBI assures stability

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

IndusInd Bank's shares surged nearly 6 per cent during Monday morning trading after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reassured customers that the bank remains 'well-capitalised,' despite instructing the board to resolve a Rs 2,100 crore accounting discrepancy by the end of the month.

The stock spiked 5.30 per cent to Rs 707.75 on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and leapt 5.58 per cent to Rs 709.90 on the National Stock Exchange (NSE), making it the top gainer among Sensex and Nifty firms.

Last week, the bank revealed an accounting discrepancy that could impact approximately 2.35 per cent of its net worth, leading to a significant decline in its stock price. The RBI noted that the bank has already brought in an external audit team to thoroughly examine its systems and assess the situation swiftly. In a statement on Saturday, the RBI directed the bank's Board and management to complete the necessary remedial actions within the current quarter, Q4 FY25, after making the required disclosures to stakeholders.

RBI clarified that depositors need not react to speculative reports at this time, emphasizing that the bank's financial health remains stable and is under close observation. *—PTI*

Wholesale price inflation rises to 2.38% in Feb

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Wholesale price inflation in India edged up to 2.38 per cent in February, attributed to rising costs of manufactured food items such as vegetable oil and beverages, according to data released by the government on Monday. This marked a slight increase from January's wholesale price index (WPI) inflation of 2.31 per cent and a notable rise from just 0.2 per cent in February 2024.

The Ministry of Commerce & Industry highlighted that the positive inflation rate in February 2025 was largely driven by higher prices in manufactured food products, food articles, other manufacturing, non-food items, and textiles. Specifically, inflation for manufactured food products surged to 11.06 per cent, with vegetable oil prices soaring by 33.59 per cent, while beverages saw a modest increase of 1.66 per cent during the month.

Conversely, the prices of certain vegetables eased, with potato prices plummeting to 27.54 per cent from a staggering 74.28 per cent in the prior month. Meanwhile, the fuel and power sector recorded a deflation of 0.71 per cent in February, improving from a deflation rate of 2.78 per cent in January. Retail inflation figures released on Wednesday indicated that Consumer Price Index (CPI) based inflation cooled to a seven-month low of 3.61 per cent in February, largely due to decreasing food item prices. *—PTI*

SpiceJet founder to infuse ₹294cr into airline via promoter group

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

SpiceJet announced on Monday that its founder, Ajay Singh, will invest Rs 294 crore into the airline through a promoter group entity by converting warrants into equity shares, subsequently increasing the promoter group's shareholding to over 33 per cent.

Singh, who serves as Chairman and Managing Director of the airline, will channel the funds through Spice Healthcare Pvt Ltd, a company within the promoter group. According to a statement from SpiceJet, Singh will convert 13,14,08,514 warrants into an equivalent number of equity shares (13.14 crore). This strategic investment will boost the consolidated shareholding of the promoter group in SpiceJet from the current 29.11 per cent to 33.47 per cent.

Additionally, Singh plans to sell up to 3.15 crore equity shares of the airline. The proceeds from this sale will help Spice Healthcare cover 75 per cent of the costs associated with the allotment of equity shares upon the conversion of the warrants. This fund infusion is part of a broader fundraising initiative previously announced.

The SpiceJet board or a board committee is scheduled to meet by 18 March to approve the allotment of these equity shares. Singh expressed that this investment will further enhance the airline's financial position and support growth efforts. He highlighted that the successful conversion of warrants and capital infusion is a significant step in SpiceJet's ongoing turnaround strategy, especially in light of recent challenges faced by the airline. The company reported a profit after tax of Rs 26 crore for the quarter ending December 2024, reflecting improved overall performance. Following this, SpiceJet shares rose over 4 per cent to Rs 47.30 on the BSE. *—PTI*

SpiceJet founder Ajay Singh plans to sell up to 3.15 crore equity shares of the airline **PHOTO: X**

Blackstone to acquire 40% stake in Kolte-Patil

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Global investment firm Blackstone has launched an open offer to acquire up to 26 per cent stake in Pune-based realty firm Kolte-Patil Developers Ltd from public shareholders for Rs 758.56 crore.

Last week, Kolte-Patil Developers announced that Blackstone would acquire a 40 per cent stake in the company for Rs 1,150 crore, entering into Indian residential market after having a significant exposure in office, shopping mall, warehousing and date centre verticals of real estate.

Blackstone affiliated firm will acquire a 14.3 per cent stake for Rs 417 crore through a preferential issue of equity shares and another 25.7 per cent stake from the promoter's group for Rs 750 crore.

On 13 March, Kolte-Patil Developers' board approved issuance by way of a preferential allotment on a private placement basis an aggregate of 1,26,75,685 equity shares of the company at Rs 329 per share, aggregating to Rs 417.03 crore to BREP Asia III India Holding Co VII Pte. Ltd. *—PTI*

India benefits amid global tariff uncertainty: SBI

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

US President Donald Trump's plan to impose reciprocal tariffs may only lead to a 3-3.5 per cent decline in Indian exports, and the effect will be negated by higher exports, according to SBI Research released on Monday.

India will also get advantage of aluminium and steel tariffs imposed by the US last week.

India runs a marginal trade deficit with the USD 13 million in aluminium goods, and USD 406 million in steel goods. While India doesn't figure among top 10 importers of steel products, it is among the top 10 in aluminium imports. However, its share has dipped from 3 to 2.8 per cent between 2018 and 2024. By leveraging new trade routes from Europe to the US, India is looking to strengthen its position in the global supply chain. *—ANI*

FAST-FASHION RETAILER FOREVER 21 FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY AGAIN

LOS ANGELES, 17 MARCH

US operating entity of fast-fashion chain Forever 21 filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, its second such move in six years due to shrinking footfall in malls and stiff competition from online players.

The firm said in a statement that its stores and website in the US will remain open as it "begins its process of winding down".

Forever 21 a favourite among young women has recently struggled to attract customers to its shops because of rising prices and the growing popularity of online shopping.

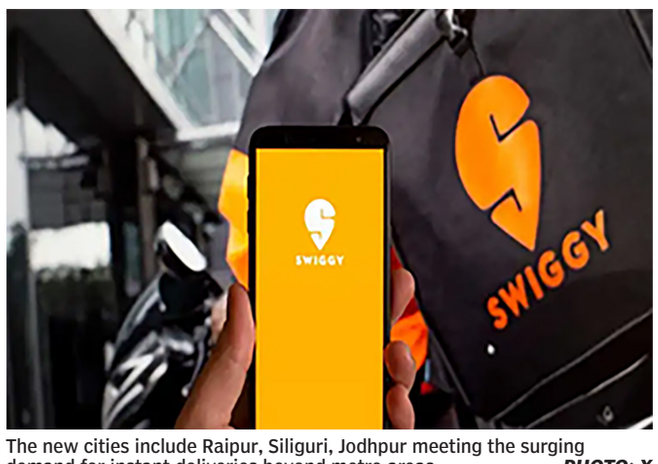
The company filed for bankruptcy protection for the first time in 2019, but a group of investors ended up buying it through a joint venture. It was founded in Los Angeles in 1984 by South Korean immigrants. *—Agencies*

Forever 21 has struggled to attract customers to its shops because of rising prices and the growing popularity of online shopping **PHOTO: X**

NOW IN 100 CITIES

Swiggy adds 10 minute delivery to 32 cities

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH



The new cities include Raipur, Siliguri, Jodhpur meeting the surging demand for instant deliveries beyond metro areas **PHOTO: X**

Swiggy Instamart, leading quick commerce platform, has expanded its lightning-fast 10-minute delivery service to 100 cities across the country.

This milestone follows the addition of 32 new cities in 2025, including Raipur, Siliguri, Jodhpur, and Thanjavur, meeting the surging demand for instant deliveries beyond metro areas.

With this expansion, millions of new customers can now access over 30,000 products, including groceries, daily essentials, electronics, fashion, beauty products, toys, and more--all delivered in just 10 minutes.

Amitesh Jha, CEO of Swiggy Instamart, highlighted the growing demand for quick commerce in smaller cities. "Over the past year, millions of Indians have relied on Swiggy Instamart for everything from groceries to festive essentials. Consumer behaviour in tier 2 and 3 cities has evolved rapidly, and convenience-led retail is gaining strong traction beyond metros." He said, "One in four new users in 2025 came from these cities, reinforcing the need for faster and more efficient delivery services. Our expansion strengthens our reach and supports local economies by empowering dark store staff and delivery partners."

To support this growth, Swiggy Instamart is enhancing its dark store network with 'megapods'--large fulfillment centers ranging from 10,000 to 12,000 square feet. Expanded inventory includes a mix of FMCG, D2C, and local brands tailored to regional preferences. For example, customers in Patna can order Sudha Milk, while Raipur residents have access to Vachan dairy products.

This localisation ensures that Swiggy Instamart delivers not just speed but also variety and relevance to each market. *—ANI*

Gold, silver rally ₹1,300 to hit record levels in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Gold and silver prices hit fresh record levels on Monday, rallying Rs 1,300 each, tracking strong trends in the global markets amid uncertainty over US tariffs, trade tensions and growing expectations of monetary policy easing by the Federal Reserve.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity, extending gains for the fourth day in a row, rallying Rs 1,300 to hit a fresh peak of Rs 90,750 per 10 grams.

It had closed at Rs 89,450 per 10 grams on Thursday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity zoomed Rs 1,300 to establish an lifetime high of Rs 90,350 per 10 grams from Thursday's closing level of Rs 89,050 per 10 grams.

According to HDFC Securities' Senior Analyst, Commodities, Saumil Gandhi, several factors have contributed to the record-breaking rally in precious metals, including buying by central banks and global economic instability.

Further, the demand for safe haven assets increased due to the trade and economic policies of US President Donald Trump, which in turn increased economic uncertainty worldwide, Gandhi said.

So far this year, the yellow metal prices had climbed Rs 11,360, or 14.31 per cent, to Rs 90,750 from Rs 79,390 per 10 grams on 1 January.

Silver prices also surged Rs 1,300 to hit a fresh all-time high level of Rs 1,02,500 per kg. The white metal had concluded at Rs 1,01,200 per kg on Thursday.

Meanwhile, gold futures for April delivery inched up Rs 13 to Rs 88,004 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange. *—PTI*

Ensure gender parity of athletes in events: Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Delhi High Court has directed the central sports ministry to ensure parity when it comes to participation of men and women athletes in the events of the national sports federations. Justice Sachin Datta directed to ensure that the pool of participating athletes was "broad enough" to include not only the athletes who had participated in international events, but also accommodate who participated in domestic or local or Khelo India events. The court order of 12 March came on a plea challenging a 13 February notification issued by the Badminton Association of India, restricting the participation of women para-athletes by providing them with only eight slots per event whereas men para-athletes received 16 slots. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Nat'l ski c'ship in Auli postponed over low snowfall

GOPESHWAR, 17 MARCH

The annual ski and snowboarding championship in Auli has been postponed yet again due to insufficient snow on the slopes. Initially scheduled from March 16-19, the event, organised by the Winter Games Federation with support from the Uttarakhand government, was postponed from January for the same reason. On Saturday, there was a small amount of snowfall, but it was inadequate to meet the technical requirements for the national-level competition. General Secretary Ajay Bhatt stated, "Only about half a foot of snow could accumulate that day, which was not enough." While national championship is postponed, local competitions and the Auli Festival are still being considered, as officials monitor the weather conditions closely. *—PTI*

Ajay Singh to face Kalita, Bhandari for BFI Prez polls

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Ajay Singh, the incumbent president of the Boxing Federation of India (BFI), seeks a third consecutive term amidst a challenge from Secretary General Hemanta Kalita and Vice President Rajesh Bhandari in the upcoming elections scheduled for March 28. Singh, also the chairman of SpiceJet Airlines, was nominated by the Uttarakhand state body and will face off against Kalita and Bhandari, who is also pursuing the North Zone vice president role. Lee's faction may explore legal options regarding the election process after their candidate, former Sports Minister Anurag Thakur, was excluded by Singh. The elections delayed since February due to turmoil in international boxing administration will also elect multiple zonal vice presidents and secretaries, with scrutiny of nominations scheduled for Tuesday. *—PTI*

Richtman is 1st American to win LA Marathon in 31 yrs

LOS ANGELES, 17 MARCH

Matt Richtman made history by becoming the first American man to win the Los Angeles Marathon in 31 years, completing the race in a personal best of 2 hours, 7 minutes, and 56 seconds. The marathon course, which begins at Dodger Stadium and winds through several iconic Los Angeles neighbourhoods, saw Athanas Kioko of Kenya secure second place in 2:10.55, while Moses Kurgat of Kenya finished third in 2:13.13. This marked Richtman's second marathon, having debuted in the Twin Cities Marathon with a time of 2:10.47 last autumn. Richtman said, "I just told myself to stay in that pack until about the halfway mark." In the women's division, Ethiopia's Tejinesh Tulu claimed victory in 2:30.16. *—PTI*

FIDE CEO backs women-only events

He says FIDE's policies should be data-driven

NICOSIA, 17 MARCH

The International Chess Federation (FIDE) CEO Emil Sutovsky has defended the need for women-only events, arguing that removing them from the international calendar would deprive many female players of opportunities for growth under the false assumption that they would develop better by competing in open tournaments.

Speaking during the fourth leg of the 2024-25 FIDE Women's Grand Prix in Nicosia, Sutovsky stated, "If we were to eliminate women-only events and support mechanisms such as travel assistance, we would be denying many talented female players crucial opportunities. The idea that women will progress better solely through Open tournaments is, in my view, a false premise."

Highlighting a concerning trend, he pointed out that despite increased efforts and higher prize money, the gap between male and female players has widened over the past 15 years. "Previously, we had top female players reaching an Elo rating of 2500 by ages 15, 16, or 17. Today, we have only a few players above 2400 at 17 or 18," he noted.

Sutovsky further emphasized that FIDE's policies should be guided by data rather than personal opinions. Unlike sports such as cricket, football, and tennis, which have separate male and female events, chess offers an Open category where players of all genders compete together, in addition to a separate Women's category exclusively for female players.

The debate over women's titles in chess was recently reignited by Indian Grandmaster R Vaishali, who suggested they should be abolished. Addressing this controversy, Sutovsky reiterated that decision-making in chess governance must be based on real data rather than public sentiment or personal beliefs. "It is essential to rely on facts, not hype or subjective opinions. Policy cannot be shaped by personal dreams alone," he asserted. *—Agencies*

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

South African batting stalwart Faf du Plessis was Monday appointed vice-captain of Delhi Capitals team for the upcoming Indian Premier League season beginning on 22 March.

The former South Africa captain will be Axar Patel's deputy in the Delhi-based franchise. Axar was named DC captain on Friday.

"I am very excited. Delhi has been great and the boys have been fantastic. Definitely, I feel happy and ready," the right-handed batter said in a video uploaded by the franchise.

The 40-year-old du Plessis led Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the last three seasons of the IPL. However, he was not retained by RCB ahead of the mega auction last year.

He was bought by Delhi Capitals for Rs 2 crore in the accelerated round of the bidding process after he did not get any takers in the opening round.

Delhi Capitals had failed to reach the play-offs round last season.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan all-rounder Azamatullah Omarzai's arrival at Punjab Kings has been postponed due to personal reasons as IPL approaches. *—PTI*

IPL fever: Jio offers 90-day free Hotstar subscription

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

With the IPL season up ahead, Jio has announced a 90-day free JioHotstar subscription for existing and new Jio SIM customers who opt for or recharge with a plan of Rs 299 or above. Existing Jio SIM users recharging with Rs 299 (1.5GB/day or more) or above plan between now and 31 March, 2025, will be able to avail the offer, as also those getting a new Jio SIM with Rs 299 (1.5GB/day or more) or above plan during this time period. Customers who have recharged before March 17, can opt for Rs 100 add-on pack. The Jio Hotstar pack will be activated from March 22, 2025 (opening match day of the cricket season) for a period of 90 days. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Khelo India Para Games vital: Gold medalist Navdeep

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Paris Paralympics gold medal-winning javelin thrower Navdeep Singh believes the Khelo India Para Games is an important platform for the continued growth of para-athletes.

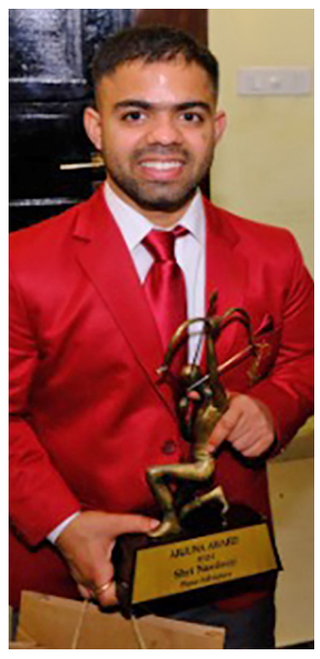
The second edition of the Khelo India Para Games (KIPG 2025) is set to kick off on Thursday and Navdeep, an Arjuna awardee, feels the tournament will help in developing the sporting ecosystem for para-athletes.

"KIPG 2025 is a great platform for senior athletes to compete against each other. We also motivate each other at all times. It further helps us in testing our training modules and practice our strengths and weaknesses before international competitions.

"We also get a chance to meet with budding athletes and get to exchange different ideas and thoughts on the competitions," Navdeep told SAI Media.

Over 1,200 para-athletes will participate across six disciplines in the seven-day tournament at three venues ---Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Indira Gandhi Stadium and the Dr Karni Singh shooting range -- in New Delhi.

"After India's performance at Paris Paralympics, there is a growing interest in the Para Games, with a lot of youngsters coming up. I am confident the Khelo India Para Games 2025 will also see several new athletes joining in to compete," Navdeep said.



Navdeep Singh **PHOTO: ANI**

"I am hopeful the country will get to witness new talent, which will help in recognising future prospects.

The inaugural edition of the Khelo India Para Games took place in December 2023 and proved to be a success.

At least 25 athletes competing in the first edition of KIPG were among India's 84-member contingent for the 2024 Paralympics in Paris. *—PTI*

Men's Hockey camp to focus on fitness

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

The men's national hockey camp, featuring a 36-member core probable group, began at the SAI Centre here on Monday, with chief coach Craig Fulton saying the focus will be on "introspecting" on recent performances. The camp will conclude on 28 March.

"It has been a busy season for the players with back-to-back events and high-quality matches.

During this camp, our focus will be more on fitness and conditioning apart from introspecting on the recent performances and where we stand in terms of key focus areas," Fulton was quoted as saying in a Hockey India release.

"Our efforts now will be towards building up for the matches in the next phase of Pro League in Europe and I will also be interested in seeing how some of the fresh talents live up to the billing," he added.

In their recent outing in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2024-25, the Indian team impressed with five wins out of the eight matches it played at home. *—PTI*

Sindhu, Lakshya aim for Swiss Open comeback

BASEL, 17 MARCH

Star shuttlers PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen will continue their quest to regain top form when the USD 250,000 Swiss Open gets underway here on Tuesday, featuring draws that are crowded with Indians.

Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu, who is seeded seventh, will take on Malvika Bansod, India's number-two female shuttler, in a clash between two generations.

Lakshya will also face a compatriot in HS Prannoy, who is a 2016 winner here, in his men's singles opening match of the BWF Super 300 tournament. Sindhu, the 2022 champion, suffered an opening round exit from the All England Championship last week after returning to action following a hamstring injury. Malvika, however, logged a confidence-boosting win over Singapore's Yeo Jia Min at the same event.

PV Sindhu; Lakshya Sen **PHOTOS: PTI**

Lakshya and Prannoy endured contrasting results in Birmingham last week with the former reaching the quarterfinals and the latter going down in the opening round. The Indian shuttlers have a formidable record at the Swiss Open. Past champions include Sindhu, K Srikanth, Prannoy, Sameer Verma, Saina Nehwal, and the men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty. *—PTI*

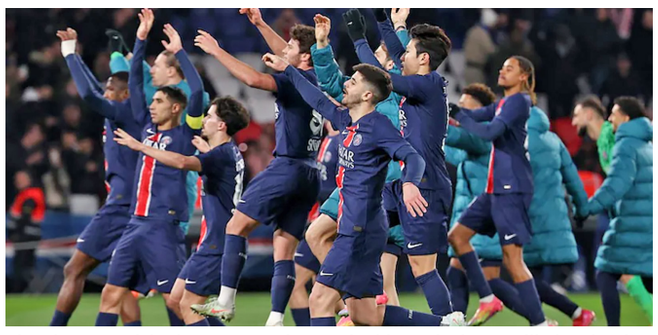
PSG win overshadowed by racist slurs

PARIS, 17 MARCH

A French campaign group has called on the country's authorities to punish homophobic and racist chanting after the biggest match in the league between Paris Saint-Germain and Marseille was marred by discriminatory singing.

The abuse tarnished PSG's 3-1 win over its bitter rival in what is known as "Le Classique".

French referees have the power to stop play if fans chant homophobic and racist slurs in stadiums. But Sunday's match at the Parc des Princes was not paused by referee Clément Turpin. The Rouge Direct group called on Monday for the ministers of sport, interior and justice, as well as officials from the French soccer federation and league, to "ensure that these illegal chants are finally severely punished."



The abuse tarnished PSG's 3-1 win over its bitter rival Marseille in what is known as "Le Classique" **PHOTO: X**

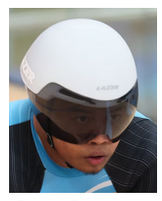
"In the mud there are rats. In the sewers there are rats. Rats are everywhere. They are the Marseillais," they sang.

The word "rat" can be used in a racist and derogatory way in the French language and the song was widely seen as referencing Marseille's large Arab minority. There was also homophobic chanting from PSG fans targeting Marseille and in particular midfielder Adrien Rabiot, who returned to his former team to a hostile reception. *—PTI*

Indian trio sets record at UCI Track Cycling Cup

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Indian cycling team comprising David Beckham, Esow Alban, and Rojit Singh has achieved a stunning feat by setting a new national record in the men's team sprint event at the UCI Track Cycling Nations Cup in Konya, Turkey. The trio clocked an impressive time of 44.187 seconds, surpassing the previous record of 44.451 seconds set during last year's Asian Track Cycling Championship.



David Beckham **PHOTO: X**

Beckham previously gained recognition at the Asian Track Cycling Championships in 2022, winning bronze alongside Ronaldo. He was also a trailblazer at the 2023 Asian Games, becoming the first Indian cyclist to reach the quarter-finals in a sprint cycling event. Earlier this year, Beckham excelled at the National Games, securing a gold medal in the men's sprint event. The UCI Track Cycling Nations Cup is an annual international competition organised by the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI), the world governing body of the sport. *—PTI*

Jack Draper claims first masters 1000 title at Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS, 17 MARCH

Jack Draper clinched his first Masters 1000 title with a commanding 6-2, 6-2 victory over Holger Rune in the final of the BNP Paribas Open.

This win not only marks a significant milestone for the 23-year-old Briton but also propels him into the ATP top 10 for the first time, moving from 14th to a career-high ranking of No. 7.

Draper, seeded 13th, displayed exceptional form throughout the match, serving 10 aces and winning 21 of 23 first-serve points, while Rune couldn't secure a breakpoint. Despite the loss, Rune congratulated Draper, acknowledging his impressive play. *—PTI*

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PCB suffers 85% loss in Champions Trophy

LAHORE, 17 MARCH

The 2025 Champions Trophy marked Pakistan's first global cricket tournament in 29 years, but it turned into a financial and logistical disaster for the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB). Despite spending Rs 869 crore, PCB suffered an 85 per cent loss, hosting just one completed home game.

PCB invested USD 58 million in upgrading venues in Rawalpindi, Lahore, and Karachi, exceeding their budget by 50 per cent. An additional USD 40 million went into event preparations, yet returns were a mere $6 million from the hosting fee, ticket sales, and sponsorships—resulting in an USD 85 million loss.

Pakistan, led by Mohammad Rizwan, played only one match at home against New Zealand in Lahore. Their Rawalpindi match vs. Bangladesh and two other games were washed out.

Meanwhile, the players' match fees in the national T20 championship were slashed by 90 per cent **PHOTO: X**

Adding to the turmoil, players bore the brunt of PCB's financial mismanagement. Match fees in the national T20 championship were slashed by 90 per cent and reserve player payments by 87.5 per cent. Cricketers, once housed in five-star hotels, were shifted to budget accommodations, while administrators continued drawing hefty salaries.

Pakistani daily Dawn reported a steep cut in domestic match fees, from USD 40,000 to USD 10,000, though PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi later intervened, revising it to USD 30,000 per match—still USD 10,000 lower than last year.

Meanwhile, former national team captain Inzamam-ul-Haq has expressed his concern over the constant decline in Pakistan cricket and attributed it to the mistakes made by those running the game in the country. "We are not working in the right direction and making the wrong calls in many areas," he said.

He blamed frequent changes in the team's management, coaches, and players *—PTI*

Bosch gets PCB notice for joining MI despite contract

LAHORE, 17 MARCH

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has issued a legal notice to South Africa's Corbin Bosch for breaching his contractual obligations with the board for joining Mumbai Indians.

Bosch, who incidentally made his debut for South Africa against Pakistan in the series earlier this year, was picked by Peshawar Zalmi in the Diamond category during the tenth edition of Pakistan Super League Players Draft, held in Lahore on 13 January.

Earlier this month Mumbai Indians, a leading franchise of the Indian Premier League, announced that it had picked Bosch as a replacement for the injured Lizaad Williams also from South Africa. The legal notice was served to Bosch through his agent, and the player has been asked to justify his actions of withdrawing from his professional and contractual commitments. PCB management has also outlined the repercussions of his departure from the league and expects his response within the stipulated time frame.

Corbin Bosch **PHOTO: X**

This is the first time since the PSL was launched in 2016 that its window will clash for quite a few matches with the IPL. *—PTI*